

A CHILD OF NATURE



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3 Copyright No.

Shelf T398C

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



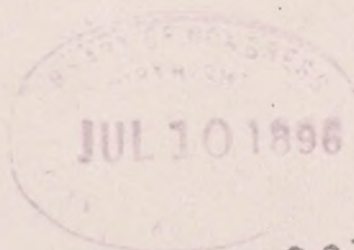
“It was Sabbath, and an undisturbed quiet rested upon the beautiful morning.”

See Page 227.

A CHILD OF NATURE

BY

✓
ABNER THORP, M. D.



34987-B²-1

CINCINNATI: CURTS & JENNINGS

NEW YORK: EATON & MAINS

1896

—A

PZ^m
T 398C

COPYRIGHT
BY CURTS & JENNINGS,
1896.

Ms. A. 9. 2. 1. Nov. 23, 1907

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.		PAGE.
AN AFTERNOON RAMBLE,		7
CHAPTER II.		
ON THE PORCH,		20
CHAPTER III.		
IN THE GARDEN,		32
CHAPTER IV.		
CHARLEY LUDLOW,		42
CHAPTER V.		
A TOWN MEETING,		54
CHAPTER VI.		
JANIE AND STELLA,		66
CHAPTER VII.		
CONCLUSIONS REACHED,		78

	CHAPTER VIII.	PAGE.
A NEW FRIEND,		89
	CHAPTER IX.	
THE WAGES OF SIN,		106
	CHAPTER X.	
WEDDED,		116
	CHAPTER XI.	
ON THE FRONTIER,		125
	CHAPTER XII.	
WIDOWED,		139
	CHAPTER XIII.	
RECONCILIATION,		149
	CHAPTER XIV.	
THE WEARY AT REST,		161
	CHAPTER XV.	
LAKESIDE,		171
	CHAPTER XVI.	
AN EVENTFUL DAY,		181

CONTENTS.

5

CHAPTER XVII.

PAGE.

DOUBTS REMOVED, 192

CHAPTER XVIII.

STELLA'S STRUGGLE, 205

CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE ISLANDS, 216

CHAPTER XX.

THE SABBATH, 227

CHAPTER XXI.

AT HOME. 237

ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE.
IT WAS SABBATH, AND AN UNDISTURBED QUIET RESTED UPON THE BEAUTIFUL MORNING,	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
THEIR HANDS MET, AND HE SEEMED TO CLING TO JANIE,	17
MORAL PURITY CAN NOT LIVE AMID SUCH SURROUNDINGS. EVIL ONLY CAN THRIVE,	107
NOW THE THREE WERE, AS USUAL, ON THE PORCH TOGETHER, . . .	165
THE LITTLE STEAMER WAS NOW LYING AT THE DOCK. TOSSING AND CHAFING AT ITS FASTENINGS	218



A CHILD OF NATURE.

CHAPTER I.

AN AFTERNOON RAMBLE.

STELLA BRADLEY and Janie Allen were slowly walking along an imperfect pathway, on the side of a country road, leading down a hill toward the river. Their arms were clinging to each other's waists, like tendrils closely binding a friendship that had known no interruption since childhood. The lovely springtime had drawn them out into the sunlight and temperate air, and their walk was aimless, save for the companionship and beauty of fair nature just aroused from winter's lethargic slumber. A soft carpet of tender green was beneath their feet; newly-clothed trees and bushes swayed to a gentle breeze, that played about their faces like kisses warm and loving; the air was redolent with odor and rhythmic with the song of birds. An unspeakable happiness filled Janie's heart, that her lips could not express. Her young womanhood blended with the pastoral scene, until

she seemed a part of nature as were the flocks quietly grazing before her lingering gaze.

The two had walked silently for a while, their arms thus clinging to each other with unyielding embrace. Stella seldom interrupted Janie's silent moods when thus rambling together, knowing that her wandering thoughts were adrift in pleasing reverie. They had passed through girlish ways, and had entered the mysterious realm of womanhood together, with its burden of strange longings and emotions. They were in perfect confidence, and, hitherto, had lived in an unshaken faith of each other.

On this beautiful afternoon, in the grateful warmth of the fragrant air and the sunshine of friendship, Janie seemed more than ever speechless in the presence of the unsolved mystery of the miracle of spring. She was deeply, silently affected. Her delicate nature framed pictures everywhere, as her eyes wandered into the sky above and among the forests and meadows and hills around. These pictures were luminous with a wondrous beauty that, in the distant, dim perspective, seemed to open into eternity. They were God's pictures, to her delicate organization, hung on every hill and wood. They could not be pointed out to Stella; for they seemed to dissolve in the effort of word analysis, and would strangely vanish. They were beheld through the vision of the soul, and were felt more than beheld; and silence seemed to weave a bewildering beauty about them, that could have no part in uttered thoughts. Janie was unusually silent to-day, and Stella, knowing nothing of her friend's unspeakable pleasure, grew wearied of the silence. There was a strange feeling of unrest and impatience disturbing her

hitherto kindly feeling for Janie; and its presence rested now like a shadow upon her unwearied friendship. They continued their silent walk thus held in the grasp of thoughts that neither could explain to the other.

Every now and then Janie would stop to pluck a golden dandelion that bloomed along the pathway; and now she had a handful of rich, exuberant color, that divided her attention with the pictures of the broad landscape. As they neared the foot of the hill, she stopped suddenly, and on one knee began to remove a few withered leaves, and then a little clod that rested on a tender plant just peering from the earth beneath.

"O Stella!" she exclaimed, "do look at this little struggling plant! Beautiful thing! it has awaked from sleep, and is striving to lift its head to a gaze of lovely nature. Are you cold in your bed of earth, you precious little mystery?" she said, now talking to it as if to a friend that could hear her words. "You want to enjoy the sunlight and warmth, I know. You shall!" she continued, clearing leaves and earth from around it. "There; how tender and delicate—and how strange! O, tell me, little plant, the mystery of your sleep and resurrection! My heart wants to know it all; tell me, you precious little thing!" and then, after a pause, she added with a sober face: "You, too, are silent. Nothing will tell me the secret. But no matter; I can wait, and believe, and trust," she said, her face seeming to light up in her own self-satisfying consolation.

"What in the world are you talking about, Janie?" asked Stella, moved by the feeling of impatience that had so strangely intruded upon her warm affection, always before so

indulgent. "You have a strange way about you sometimes that I can not understand!" she added sharply.

"Do you think so?" asked Janie, with a surprised look.

"I sometimes think your mind wanders," Stella replied, with some hesitation; for she would not wound Janie's sensibilities, and yet could not keep back the thought which she knew to be harsh.

Janie was thoughtful for a few moments, and then wound her arms, as before, about Stella's waist, and together they continued their walk down the lane, silently. If touched by Stella's words, she did not show it. Indeed it could not have been expected of her; for she was trustful and loving and forgiving. Presently they entered upon the dusty highway, and, crossing it, they pushed aside the bushes that fringed a narrow strip of woods that skirted the river bank. The water of the little stream lay in pools, or flowed in tiny streams among the rocks, or over gravelly beds. The usual spring freshets had not yet appeared to swell the river into a flood extending over the surrounding low lands, as sometimes happened. Spring, this year, had come with balmy breath rather than in tearful showers; and nature had wreathed its beautiful face in smiles. Janie's heart responded with quickened beats and strange emotions to the quiet, peaceful loveliness that appeared to awake nature and arouse it from gentle slumber, the babbling water at her feet, like tender musical notes, rippling among the rounded stones to add its spell to the awakening.

They tossed stones into the little pools, and watched the wavelets growing into larger and still larger circles until broken and lost upon the shores that rimmed them about.

They dipped their little hands into the transparent water, to catch the darting minnows that turned their silvery sides to the sunlight, as if in play. They climbed out to the rocky bed of the stream on stepping-stones, and blithely enjoyed the pastimes so suggestive to every one beside a shallow stream.

At length, weary of such sport, they sat down on a mossy bank, in a rambling talk of innocence. But Janie was not yet diverted from the enthrallment of beautiful nature. It was natural to her that, when beneath the canopy of the sky and in the presence of broad fields and wooded clumps, she should lose herself irresistibly in dreamy contemplation. So now the spell came back to her, inspired by a little tender tuft drooping from an oak-branch within her reach. She sprang to her feet as her eyes caught the object, and, with an endearing expression, plucked the tender branch, that was of a light yellowish green, blended with shades of umber, and caressingly laid it in her soft palm, and smiled upon it as she would have done upon a new-fledged soul lying helplessly in her arms. It was a beautiful smile, reflected from a pure heart, that felt the impress of the great, pulseless heart of nature.

"O, Stella!" she again exclaimed, "was ever anything so lovely?" and, with a lingering gaze into her friend's face, besought her interest in the velvety spray she stretched toward her in her open palm. "See the unformed leaves just looking through the half-open bud, that in a few days will be the tough branch of the great tree! It has nestled through the cold winter in that speck of a bud that has now been riven by the touch of spring. How could those leaves have been formed in the dark, mysterious bud? Tell me,

Stella! Do! O, I know what you will say, Stella, Nature! Yes, yes! True, but what is nature, with its wondrous intelligence and constancy? My reason and heart say, God; but men say, Nature. What is nature if not the expression of God's thought, touched by the majesty and might of his will?"

"You ensnare yourself in a tangle of unfathomable mysteries, Janie, by your constant struggle to know what the great teachers of knowledge can not explain. Why bother with such thoughts?" Stella answered with a touch of impatience.

An expression of pain crossed Janie's beautiful face for a moment—for only a moment. Then, in a subdued but decided voice, she replied:

"But I *feel* something I can not explain, something my senses can not fathom, something more than exacting skepticism can account for. I do not know what it is; for it is above reason, argument, conjecture. I believe it a soul-experience, Stella; for it gives me an ecstatic happiness that is beyond all other life-experiences;" and she sat as lost in intense absorption, her look fixed upon the tender plant in her still open hand.

"But why not do as our wise men—call it Nature, and cease to bother your brain? You see it can do you no good. If our philosophers can satisfy themselves by the word *Nature*, why not you? You will unsettle yourself by your constant dwelling on such a foolish question."

Janie turned a look of gentle reproach upon her friend; but in a moment it was transformed into a lingering smile, so winning that Stella was touched, and hastily recalled her words by a quick apology.

"Forgive me, Janie!" she said. "I did not mean to hurt your feelings; only I can not understand you sometimes. You are so queer!" she added, hesitatingly, as if doubting whether she had bettered the matter by such a statement.

"I wonder if anybody can understand my feelings," answered Janie, wistfully looking into her friend's face. "I think I am a child—a thing of nature as the flowers and trees are, with a soul that feels the touch of God's presence as plants the warmth of the quickening sun-rays. I seem a part of the woods and meadows and clouds and air; and the birds and lambs and flowers seem to talk to me—not as human beings, but with silent voices that thrill somewhere in the labyrinth of the heart instead of the labyrinth of the ear."

Both Stella and Janie were beautiful young women, and Janie in particular now, under the influence of her elevated pleasure. Her face was lit up by a glow that made every feature attractive. Her presence was such as to arrest attention at all times, because of her regular, faultless symmetry of face and quiet pose of manner. Her eyes were large and blue and full of alert expressiveness, and at times seemed to partake of the deeper color of the violet she loved so dearly. Her forehead lifted in a high and broad expanse that was crowned by clusters of golden hair. Her chin, beneath a chaste mouth, was full and firm of character; so that to a spiritual and sensitive nature was added the grace of resolution that would be firm in defense of convictions. She was of medium height, slender, supple, graceful, and characterized by a striking individuality and intellectuality.

She was an example of perfect womanhood, shaped and molded by a Divine artist.

As she now sat beside her friend, excited by the play of deep emotions inspired by her heart-cravings, she was beautiful in the eyes of Stella to the point of envy. As Stella looked upon her a feeling of bitterness crept into her heart, the like of which she had faintly felt upon other occasions; but never so strongly marked as now. An echo of this sentiment rose to her lips, as she looked at her friend caressing and talking to the inanimate sprig of oak nestling in her palm.

"O, Janie! You make yourself ridiculous by such foolishness; do throw the thing away, and be more like a natural woman!" she said, with an impatient voice and manner that were new to herself and a surprise to Janie.

Janie felt the change of manner in her friend, and was speechless for a time under its shock. But in her generous and forgiving nature she vaguely blamed herself for Stella's change; and, rising from her seat, she pinned the sprig to her bosom, and placing her arm about Stella's waist again, together they started homeward.

"I know you think me foolish," Janie said, as they walked along; "but I can't help it. I do love nature so dearly, and I *feel* so deeply that I can not disguise my words or acts," she added, as if in extenuation of her foolishness. "You have never found fault with me before," she continued, looking into her friend's face for a solution of the mystery. "Why, dear, do you think me foolish to-day?"

"I don't know," answered Stella, thoughtfully. "Perhaps because I am foolish," she added, looking away from Janie, unwilling to bear her lingering gaze.

"You could not be that, Stella," Janie answered, quickly. "You are my dear friend, you know," she added, affectionately patting her hand that she had grasped but a moment before.

This was the first little interruption of harmonious friendship the two had known for years. Nothing of consequence, to be sure; but still a surprise to both.

"How could it have happened? I must restrain my impulsive feelings, else Stella will weary of me," Janie exclaimed to herself, touched by a feeling of sadness.

"Why am I so impatient to-day with Janie, I wonder?" thought Stella. "Heretofore her moods have amused me, and I have been diverted, never before oppressed by them."

The two walked along as they had done an hour before; but without the tightened grip of then. They were free in conversation, and without apparent restraint, but still with an undefined suppression of gayety, as if a cloud had overcast their sky, leaving a shadow upon their inner selves.

Stella was also a beautiful woman; but of a different type from Janie. She lacked the firm poise of resolution that characterized Janie, and was surprisingly vacillating at times. She was the opposite of Janie in spirituality and reverence for the beautiful, though highly cultured and of a discriminating mind. She had been amused by Janie's peculiarities rather than in harmony with them. Her temperament was rugged, willful, reliant, secretive, with great possibilities as the world should enlarge and expand before her young womanhood. No one could foretell the course

she would pursue as impulse and motive would largely control. She had a beautiful face, as judged by men's standards of beauty. She was lovely, also, in her full and well-developed person, and in her self-confident carriage. Her face was full and rounded, of dark complexion, with brown eyes shading into blackness, arched by heavy eyebrows. Both were about the same age—perhaps two and twenty. They were neighbors, and had been schoolmates, graduating in the same class. Every advantage had been given them by indulgent parents, and they were educated and accomplished. As we now meet them for the first time, loitering by the highway, it is in equal enjoyment of advantages; and together they tarried on the threshold of womanhood, anxiously contemplating the distant future.

As the lane they were pursuing neared the crest of the long hill, another crossed it at right angles. Both seemed at the same moment to descry the near approach of a finely-formed and elegantly-dressed gentleman. It was evident that he recognized them as well; for he raised his hat with a smile before his voice could be heard.

"Charley Ludlow!" said Stella, with a start; and in the instant took her arm from about Janie's waist. Her look was eager and manner animated as she spoke.

"Yes; I see," quietly replied Janie, her face slightly flushing.

"Let us wait for him!" said Stella, stopping. "He beckons!"

Janie would have proceeded, but Stella restrained her gently, grasping a fold of her dress.



“Their hands met, and he seemed to cling to Janie.”

—Page 17.

Hastily approaching them, he exclaimed from a little distance:

"Beautiful day! Beautiful faces! Out for a ramble, I see!" again lifting his hat politely and with a winning smile.

He had mixed compliments of the weather and faces together, and in such form that neither of the young ladies could demur. But Stella said in reply:

"What are you doing, if not in this lonely place on a like rambling mission? No one could have expected you here!"

"O well, you know I am here and there and everywhere," he answered, with a shade of embarrassment, and an apparently forced laugh.

"We don't see much of you of late, it is true," said Stella, eagerly. "Are you home now for a length of time, or but for a day?"

"I don't know—that is, I can't tell," he answered, evasively, stepping up to Janie's side, and looking intently into her face. "Not a word as yet from your lips," he said to her, reproachfully.

"You know you are always welcome," she answered, calmly.

"But then I like to hear it from your lips. I can't take too much for granted. Can't you shake hands with me, Janie? That would add pleasure to the assurance," he said, with an air of hungry eagerness.

"Certainly, if it will please you," she answered with the formal calmness that had characterized her words of welcome.

Their hands met, and he seemed to cling to Janie until

she withdrew her hand by apparent force and under embarrassment.

Stella witnessed this open demonstration with a clouded brow and a feeling of resentment in the heart.

"I suppose you do not care to shake hands with me," she said in measured words and with a look of offense.

"Now, Stella!" he answered, turning his steady gaze full upon her, "your hand always welcomes me, but this little one is seldom proffered," he added in excuse. "I have always to ask it as a favor from her," he concluded, looking wistfully into her face.

"O, indeed!" Stella retorted, with acerbity.

"Pray, do not be offended with me, Stella. You know we are too old friends to take slights that are not intended as such," and his bright smile broke down her feeling of jealousy that had, for the moment, betrayed her.

And still Janie was silent.

They walked on to the village in pleasant, rambling conversation, in which Stella and Charley almost entirely appropriated the time, though he made many efforts to engage Janie's attention unavailingly.

They stood at last before Janie's gate, just as the setting sun was seen to dip beneath the western horizon in a bed of crimson hue. With intent look she watched the play of color, and its beauty stilled the tempest that had raged in her heart since her hand had felt the rude grip of her old friend and playmate in the lane a short while before.

Then she was aroused by his exclamation: "Good-night, Janie; I will see you again soon!"

She still stood at the gate, dreamily looking at Stella as

she and Ludlow passed down the street, her hand locked in his arm, and her eager eyes fixed on his face, which was inclined low towards her own. She saw Stella and Mr. Ludlow enter her gate, and mechanically returned the kiss which Stella tossed towards her with a wave of the hand.

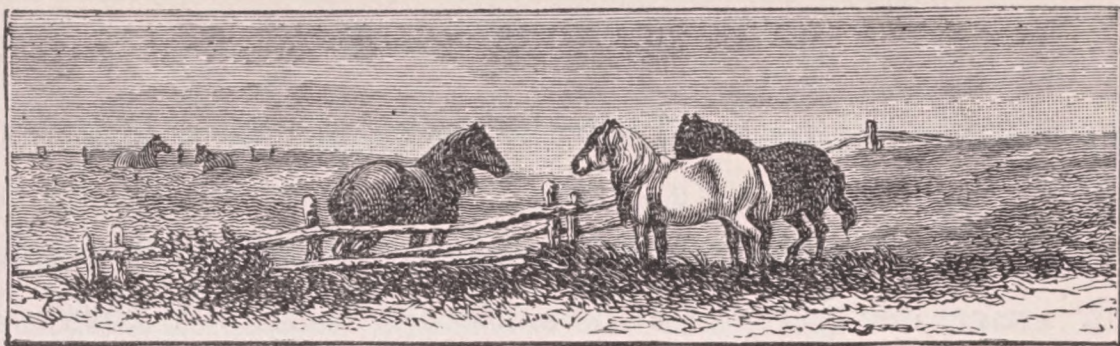
Then she entered her own door, and met the cheerful face of her mother with a saddened expression.

"Ah, Janie, you are back, are you? You must have had a delightful walk. But—you are pale, dear! Can it be a tear I saw fall from your eyelid?" and the mother was transformed into intensest solicitude in a moment.

"It is nothing, mother," she replied with an effort, "nothing at all," and she gently lifted the hand that was resting on her arm now, and silently passed out of the room and to her own.

Janie was inexpressibly sad. What had suddenly come over her she could not explain to her own self-questionings. The silent touch of human emotions was at play with her sensitive heart, that the maiden can not understand in awaking to the realities of womanhood. All the afternoon her sensitive nature had felt the mystery of changing emotions; and the thoughts that had come with the presence of Mr. Ludlow had bewildered her.

She must sit quietly down, now, and think—think until she can solve the strange doubt and mistrust of the man whom she had tried to love.



CHAPTER II.

ON THE PORCH.

ON the broad porch that curved around the front and west side of the old-fashioned house, sat Mr. and Mrs. Allen, enjoying the grateful warmth of the afternoon sun, and the beautiful foliage that had already clothed the trees in delicate shade. They were a contented, happy couple, who had fought the battles of mature life together, and were now in quiet retirement and in the peaceful retrospection of well-spent lives. Their only child was Janie, the fair-faced lover of nature, who had spoken her thoughts to her friend Stella the day before.

For many a year Mr. and Mrs. Allen had lived in a beautiful village, set high on the crest of a hill overlooking the Miami River and low-lying country about. Though not an immediate suburb of Cincinnati, it was thought by the villagers to be an appanage at least; for many of its business men resided here, going and returning daily.

Many like traits of character were recognizable in Janie and her mother. Their kindly manners were exquisitely

portrayed in all the commonplace events of their daily lives. Perfect purity, evenness of temper, and kindly, unselfish forbearance, clothed them as with a matchless garment.

The father was a well-rounded man in character, lacking, however, the refinements of his wife and daughter. As a farmer during much of life, his isolation from the amenities of society, and association with the animals and furrows of soil that he had so long upturned with the plow, had impressed his actions, though unaffected in heart. His perceptions were not as acute nor his reasoning faculties as quick as the wife's; for it was a subtle intuition that seemed to illumine her mind—a faculty concealed in the dim chambers of the inexplicable mystery of human life divinely sensitized.

Mrs. Allen had lain awake much of the night, tortured by vague sympathy for some intangible grief or trouble, which had found birth in the tears that had dropped from Janie's eyes the evening before. She had not asked of Janie an explanation, but attempted to fathom the mystery by conjectures, and alone with her own heart-thoughts.

Mr. Allen rather aggravated her trouble by a vexatious remark. He said:

"I do not understand, mother, why you and Janie have been looking at each other all the day so suspiciously. You seem afraid of each other for some reason. It may be a secret you desire to keep from me."

"There is no secret between us," Mrs. Allen quietly answered; "but there are heart-thoughts at times that can not be explained or become subjects of conversation."

"I do not understand that," he answered. "I never have a thought that I can not explain or tell to another. I think

there must be some romance about such a proposition; for it is not reasonable."

"Still," Mrs. Allen anxiously replied, "there may be heart-suspense and undefined apprehensions that are torturing, though undefinable. Words can not reach them. We feel deeper at times than tongue can express," she concluded, with a deeply-thoughtful look.

"I do not understand that, either," said Mr. Allen, with a restless manner. "There is nothing that can not be told."

Mrs. Allen replied, after some moments of earnest thoughtfulness:

"You may not understand me. Possibly I do not understand myself; for there is something mysteriously hid away in the silent depths of the heart that we feel. It is like another language than our own, and can find audience only in the ears of the Divine presence overshadowing us. That is what I mean," she said, wistfully, doubting if she had even yet made herself intelligible.

"Still an enigma," answered Mr. Allen, perversely.

"I am sure Janie understands me. I do wish you could," she replied in a discouraged tone.

How plainly the mother and Janie are alike—the one but the impress of the other! The inheritance has come by some strange power of life—a subtle process that can never be defined or analyzed. What is it? We would pause to ask the philosopher, the physician, the scientist, the atheist, the dreamers of dreams; but it eludes the eager search of all alike. We can not find the solution in matter, for that is inert and dead; it can not be found in nature, for that word is unsatisfying and tells only of the fact. Hered-

ity is but one of the mysterious complexities of human life. Janie and her mother would solve the mystery by an unhesitating and confident answer. They would say, from God, though science should deny; they would say God, with an echo from the heart that would appeal to the reason. To them it is felt—as the mother vainly attempted to describe to the husband—a feeling to which language is denied, and yet more convincing than conjectures, the evidence materialism would offer.

Mrs. Allen was not conscious of this little digression of thought, though the sentiment would be natural to her delicate, refined, and loving organization. Doubt and infidelity could not find congenial soil in which to thrive in her heart, that could feel as well as know.

But Mr. Allen said to the wife's reference to Janie: "I know she and you are much alike;" and then with a touch of feeling: "I wish, though, she were more like Stella."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Allen, in surprise.

"For the reason that I believe she would then have more stability of character," he answered petulantly, as if his words were a reproach to his own better judgment.

"Stability of character," she repeated. "Surely you can not mean stability of character! That implies weakness in Janie," she said, feelingly.

"I mean just what I say," he answered, with persistence and uneasily.

He now realized that he had spoken hastily, but was unwilling to withdraw his unnatural statement. He had not the moral courage in the presence of his self-pride to acknowledge an error; he would rather the wrong should

stand than bear a trifling humiliation before his wife, whose judgment he respected. And now he was defiant in manner, piqued that the mother had so quickly sprung to the daughter's defense. He felt still more deeply when she answered with a flush of indignation overspreading her calm features:

"I am almost pained that you should think her weak in that direction above all others," pausing in the needlework in which she had been engaged. "Even you do not understand your own daughter, evidently."

"I think I do, though!" he retorted, with acerbity.

"No purer, more stable character can be found than our little Janie. She will never waver or swerve from the right. She has a heart that Stella can not know to protect her. She will be exalted when Stella will fall; for Stella is weak in moral tone, and is vacillating and unstable, as you may sometime have the opportunity of judging for yourself," she said, with flushed excitement, knowing better the daughter's character than did the father.

"If you object to stability, then let the word weakness apply—they may be synonymous as applied to womanly traits," he unyieldingly asserted.

"In what way?" asked Mrs. Allen, in unfeigned astonishment, a deeper look of indignation overspreading her face.

"By her indifference to every household duty, she chases phantoms! I fear she will never make a wife for any one. In all her inclinations she is unpractical," he answered, warmly.

"And yet since childhood you have declared she could not be a farmer's wife; that her delicate sensibilities and ardent nature unfitted her for drudgery. You have been unspar-

ing in her accomplishments, and have even rejoiced with pride in her loving, kindly nature. She is what you would have her be. O, thou inconsistent man! She is pure in character, and firm of resolution as are the solid rocks; and never will adversity or temptation harm her womanhood. Though weak, as you interpret her actions, she is infinitely superior to the model you have chosen by which to judge her. It is a consoling thought that her character is established upon a moral basis that can not be shaken. Your model may fail for lack of this quality alone. It is the essential of all grandeur in womanly character. She is not weak, but strong, as I know from a mother's understanding and intimacy with her heart-thoughts."

There was no halting utterance in Mrs. Allen's statements. Her words seemed to surge up as a flood bursting through a barrier, and carried conviction even to the wavering mind of her husband.

"You may be right," he at last falteringly replied.

"I am right, dear. I have an unshaken faith in her future life, as I have in God's presence in the glowing heavens. Reproach can never attach to her. She is unsailable," she continued, with kindness and a gentle manner that turned Mr. Allen's fears and reproaches into an exultant confidence.

Mrs. Allen and Janie were strong, though delicate in physical characteristics. It was that fine, incisive quality that cuts with keen edge through grosser thoughts, and turns aside the stolidity of duller natures. It was the finely-tempered intellect and intuition that sees farther, and feels deeper, and knows more certainly than dull animalism.

The husband usually gave way to the wife in mental struggles. It was not surprising that now he should shrink from further comparisons; that his loving confidence in Janie should be turned back to its old and well-worn channel.

After a brief lapse in the conversation, he said to his wife, as if in recognition of her sterling qualities:

"Janie will not err while you live, dear. I know I can have no part in her training. My manners are like my hands, rough and hard. I leave her to you; but I want her love, if she can love a harsher nature than her mother's."

"No fear of Janie loving her father less for the calloused hands that have worked for her so devotedly; nor fear that she will fail to recognize the warm heart beneath her father's manners. There is where she is the true woman. Were we both unpresentable as human caricatures, still we would be loving parents in her faithful estimation. Can you think as much for Stella? You shake your head. Though nurtured with the same care as Janie, is she loving and deferential to those who have done so much for her, even now? What will it be in the whirl of life's temptations? Her pent-up forces are likely to overleap her moral restraints, and run riot. She is full of latent impulses," Mrs. Allen said, as if moved by prophetic convictions.

But their conversation was interrupted by Janie's quiet approach, which was with a smile as fervent and cheering to their hearts as the bright sunlight to their physical sensibilities.

The father made way for her, and placed a chair between himself and wife that she might be near to them both. In her presence his rough exterior seemed to be transformed to

a gentle, caressing, kindly way; and his usually inanimate look to quick amiability, that was like a self-effacement. Her calm serenity seemed to shine on every nature with an assurance of purity and innocence. She was a loving, lovable character, of whom jealousy would be cruel and unreasonable.

The mother reached out and took her little hand in her soft palm, with a clinging warmth that instinctively riveted their gaze upon each other in looks of happy trustfulness. At that moment, upon every heart a love that knew no worldly taint settled like a silent benediction. Janie brought this happiness to her loving parents that banished, in the instant, every trace of feeling that had surged between husband and wife but a brief while before.

"I have been wishing for you," said the father.

"Yes? Why, papa?" she asked, with a smile.

"O well," he answered, hesitatingly, "I do n't know. I guess because we like to have you with us; that's all."

"Thank you!" she answered. "You are so kind!"

The mother interrupted the endearing expressions, after a little, and said:

"I suppose you have seen Charley Ludlow, have you not?"

"Yes," she answered, with a timid look. "Stella and I met him yesterday eve. He walked part of the way home with us."

"How does he look?" asked Mrs. Allen, with interest.

"As usual, I think," Janie quietly answered.

"It seemed to me, when I saw him last, that his face bore traces of care. I was not altogether pleased with his appearance," the mother said, guardedly.

"Something undefinable crept into my heart yesterday, also," Janie answered, very soberly. "I fear that I do not understand him. I felt something like distrust."

"There is something wrong somewhere, I am sure; I feel it strangely," said the mother, with anxiety lest she should cross her daughter's happiness by intangible forebodings.

"You are too suspicious," interrupted Mr. Allen. "We have known Charley since a boy, and have had no occasion for fault-finding heretofore. Is that not true?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Allen, hesitatingly.

"Then what is the trouble now?" he persistently inquired.

"It is his general appearance, and furtive look especially, that has come of late. It is not natural to him. It is a look, I believe, that good men do not have."

"You may not be a good judge of men," replied Mr. Allen, laughingly.

"True, dear; but, as I have always said to you, there are things we feel—impressions we can not account for—and they are very often true," she said, with guarded decision.

"I believe you, mother," said Janie; "for with Charley there is something I can not reconcile. I hope I am not unjust to him."

"Be patient," said Mrs. Allen, pleadingly, to Janie. "Wait, without committing your feelings, to future developments. Will you not do this for me?" she asked, with eager face.

"I will, mother. I am heart-free now, but sometimes oppressed strangely," she answered, with frank trustfulness.

"Why oppressed, dear?"

"With his persistent earnestness of manner towards me, and with Stella's impatience at such times. He acts with indifference to her presence, and she with exceptions to his partiality."

"But you do not encourage his advancements?"

"By no means. On the contrary, I sometimes reproach myself for my silence in his presence. He strives to rally me; but of late I fear more and more to talk to him. His compliments are sometimes rude, I think, and indelicate. He has now, more than ever, a bold and disrespectful way. It hurts me," Janie said, with a look of distress.

"How does Stella treat him?"

"With perfect freedom and confidence. It seems to me that she, too, is changing; for she likes his rough expressions, and is no longer reproachful of his brusque and indelicate ways. And, then, it seems to me that a spirit of jealousy has taken hold of her. It is becoming more pronounced every day. I do hope nothing will come between us," Janie concluded, sadly.

"I believe nothing will interrupt your mutual friendship but a man," Mrs. Allen replied, as if to prepare her daughter for events that might occur in the future.

"But, mamma, I hardly think we could love the same man; our tastes differ," Janie said, to controvert the suspicion which had been expressed.

"The future will demonstrate. If anything should, do n't be shocked or too sorely grieved," she answered, significantly, and with deep solicitude. "I would be glad, dear, if you will keep nothing from me—for the sake of our mutual

happiness, you know," Mrs. Allen added, still grasping her daughter's hand.

"But we have never had concealments," answered Janie.

"Nor may there ever be any! Did Stella come between you and Charley, yesterday?"

"Not exactly," replied Janie, with a vacant look beyond them. "He wanted me to shake hands with him, which you understand I had not refused to do, only it did not occur to me as necessary or expected, and I did not offer it. He seemed somehow to chide me for not eagerly welcoming him as Stella appeared to do. She took it up at once, and complained that he did not care to shake hands with her, and reproaches of a trifling character passed between them on my account. It made me feel badly; and when I had almost by force to withdraw my hand from his, I was mortified and almost offended by his manner. The effect impressed me for a length of time, and I may have showed it, mamma, when you met me then. Forgive me if I left you, at the time, without an explanation. I could not talk."

The father's face wore a look of indignation, and he moved restlessly in his chair, but without interruption.

"That accounts for the tear I detected on your cheek," said the mother, tenderly.

"Yes: I presume so," Janie answered.

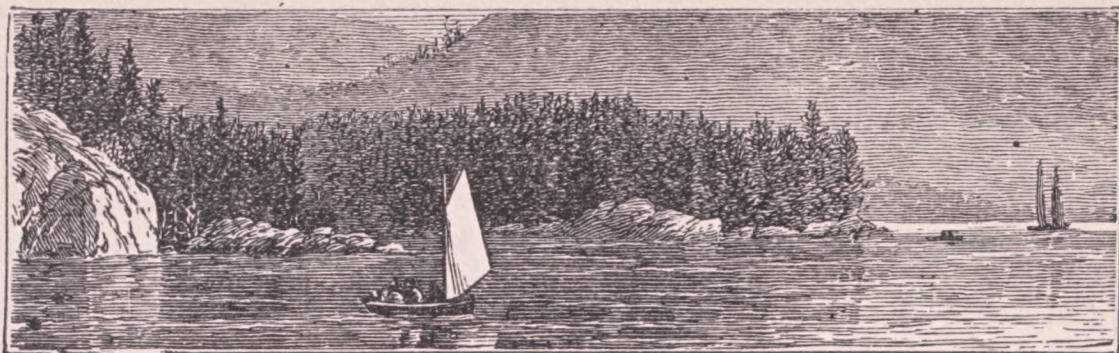
"And it also accounts for the secret which your father claimed awhile back, existed between you and me; but which I assured him was imaginary. Do you understand now, dear, that I had feelings of suspense and dread without form or character?" she asked of Mr. Allen.

He assented gladly, and then, with considerable emotion, said :

“I do not object, Janie, to your meeting Charley, or to his calling upon you, or to his friendship, or love if you incline that way ; but, let me tell you, if ever I know him to abuse or insult you, it will go hard with him,” and he surveyed his rough hands for a moment, as if appealing to them as willing instruments with which to execute the threat.

A stillness, in which all seemed intently thinking, now rested upon them for a time. Each one wrestled with individual burdens. A commonplace event may have been the cause of self-examination at this moment ; but life-burdens sometimes have their beginning in little things, that grow in momentum with passing years, until hope and happiness and life are crushed in the end.





CHAPTER III.

IN THE GARDEN.

JANIE left her parents, and went to the garden, where a little plot of ground had been set apart for the flowers she venerated for their color, their perfume, their beauty—for the mystery of their lives. With true affection she prepared their soft bed, and watched eagerly their first tender coming, and guarded them from noxious weeds as she would have done the heart of a child from sin. Innocently she would talk to them as if sentient with human life, and lingered wonderingly upon the inspiring thoughts they silently aroused. To her, nature was animated with myriad tongues that seemed to commune with her silent soul-life; and they talked of things the whirl of human passions could not suggest. Out of all this tender blending of self and nature, in her gentle purity a calm, satisfying, unshaken self-evident truth took shape; and, looking beyond nature and self, she saw the God of creation enthroned above all—a personality. She felt that, in asking of us to be true, just, merciful, loving, he is himself what he asks of us. Thus it was not

dumb nature working out an aimless destiny, but the Divine mind and heart guiding all things with perfect wisdom, though earthly eyes could not penetrate the mystery behind the veil. Thus it may be understood why Janie loved nature,—it was for the great God she saw through the beauties of nature. As she talked to her flowers, therefore, she seemed to talk through them to God who had designed their beauty; and her thoughts were as prayers to the Divine Presence, to which she seemed very near. The suggestions of the past day were still lingering in her mind, and she was not free now from an undefined heartache and sadness. Her tender nature had been bruised by the presence of suspicions. She had sought the refuge of her garden for escape from such feelings, and would have been glad to remain undisturbed.

She paused, therefore, with a shade of sadness, as Stella's voice was heard talking back to her mother as she hastened towards the garden along the smooth pathway leading to it from the house.

As the gate swung wide, Stella exclaimed: "Ah, Janie, I have found you at last."

With a proffered kiss, Janie replied, languidly but pleasantly: "I am looking after my little miracles."

"But they can not talk with you," said Stella.

"Perhaps! but still I love them, you know."

"O, there are better things than they to love!" Stella answered, with a trace of excitement in her manner.

"I think my love of flowers, though, help me to love my friends better than if without them."

"But, Janie, I believe that in loving flowers you forget to love your friends."

"O no; I have never discovered where they had that tendency; but, on the other hand, the same feeling they claim from me extends towards friends perforce."

"But then," said Stella, "I do not believe in making companions of such lowly things. I prefer to have something human, something more tangible—manly, if you please!" she added, laughingly.

At the suggestion, Janie looked into the face of her friend intently; and, with a shade of embarrassment, she moved as if to stoop down again to her flower-bed.

But Stella hastened to say: "I have something to tell you, Janie. I can not rest till you hear it."

Janie turned calmly to her again, and stood in silent expectancy; so indifferently, however, that Stella was vexed, and poutingly said:

"You are not interested, I believe, in what I want to say."

"Indeed I am," Janie replied, though she regretfully divined that it referred to Charley Ludlow.

"We will see! You know Charley went home with me last night, after leaving you at the gate?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea how long he remained?" she asked; and then, "I do n't suppose you care?"

"Why should I?"

"O, I thought you especially interested in him!"

"As an old friend, only."

"Well, he staid till ten o'clock; something he never did before. He took tea with us also," she said with an air of exultation.

"Yes!" Janie quietly replied, and with as much indifference as she could command. It was strange, she thought, that she should experience an anxious, even trembling feeling through the statement.

"And he talked during most of the evening of you."

"Disparagingly?" asked Janie.

"O no! It was I who said the disparaging things. I told him of your queer ways," she said, laughingly. "But he was interested, and seemed more than pleased with you by every unkind thing I could say. Nothing would divert his praise, and so I turned to flattery; and that delighted him still more. The fact is, I was nothing to him at all."

"I know you are making light of me!" said Janie, uneasily, undecided as to Stella's real motive or the exact truthfulness of her statements.

"Indeed I am not," Stella insisted. "It is just as I tell you, truthfully."

While Janie was soberly thinking, Stella continued:

"The strangest part is now to come. He had the audacity to tell me, in my own house, just before leaving, that he loved you."

Janie started at the announcement, and betrayed to her friend a deeper surprise or interest than could have been expected. She simply said, in reply:

"You surprise me, Stella!"

"Had he told me this in the early part of the evening he would not have remained so long. So cold a treatment would have been his that the visit would have been shortened;" and she acted as if her pride had been deeply wounded.

"O, you would not have been rude to him, I know," said Janie, deprecatingly.

"Well," Stella continued, laughingly, and with an entire change of manner, "though he did say he loved you, still he was so affectionate towards me, and said so many pleasant things, that I freely forgive him. I am half inclined to think he doesn't know his own mind; that is, whether it is you or me he loves best."

Janie was still more sobered by Stella's statement. "He must be playing false to one or the other," she thought; and her suspicions of yesterday were strengthened in the moment.

"You do not mean to say that he played love to you, and talked of love for another at the same time, Stella?" said Janie, indignantly.

"As I say, Janie, I don't believe he knows his own mind," replied Stella, in excuse.

"But I am sure he knows perfectly well what he is doing!" answered Janie, decidedly,

"Why, you little woman, I did not know you knew so much of men and the world," exclaimed Stella, impulsively, momentarily embarrassed in the presence of Janie's reproachful look, and realizing that she had betrayed her own indifference to his lack of gentlemanly honor.

"I don't know much of men's ways, it is true, Stella; but I reach conclusions sometimes by a very short cut. I feel many things I can not give a reason for. I will say now, that I can not rid myself of the conviction that Charley Ludlow can not be trusted implicitly."

"Why, Janie!" said Stella, recovering herself, "I

thought you of that trusting character that could see evil in no one; and now you are full of subtle wisdom, that determines men's character through harmless actions. Take care that nature does not delude you in your blind love for it, and leave you stranded and a petulant, withered old maid."

"Better that, Stella, than to be deceived by heartlessness, and be left a stranded moral wreck, hopeless, degraded, and abandoned," replied Janie, with a look that carried the conviction to Stella's mind that she would not trifle with fair words and deceiving blandishments.

Janie was startled and pained by the words she had listened to, so unlike what Stella had ever before uttered. They were reckless words. "Can it be," thought Janie, "that he has already broken down some of her bars of womanly delicacy, and blunted her finer and purer sensibilities? His freedom of manner must have made an impression," she thought, as she recalled Stella's confession of but a few moments before. "By taking warning she would increase her own vigilance," she concluded.

Thus thinking, she allowed several moments of silence to break into the conversation. Stella interrupted it by saying:

"Leaving the moral question out of consideration, are you not pleased, Janie, with Charley's confession of love for you?"

"Though my parents have never objected to his advancements in the past; and though we have been accepted as lovers by our friends; and though he has done nothing directly to turn me against him, it can never be more than the present until the vague feeling of mistrust which has taken possession of me is entirely effaced," answered Janie,

with a decision of manner that Stella could not misunderstand. "I must know more of the man than I do now," she concluded, earnestly.

"You are overly particular. You are burdened by scruples," answered Stella, impatiently. "I am glad I am not so narrow."

Janie felt hurt by Stella's manner, but did not show it. A heavy weight seemed suddenly to press upon her heart. Stella waited but for a moment, and then continued:

"You seem to suspicion Charley in some way, but are not able to prefer direct charges. That is hardly fair to any one. We might all suffer reproaches in that way. Do you not think so?"

"It is not every one who is surrounded by suspicious circumstances," replied Janie, quietly.

"Pray name them in his case," said Stella, with what seemed to Janie a faint sneering curve of the lips.

"Why is he so much from home?" asked Janie.

"In pursuit of business, I suppose."

"Why are his movements surrounded with an air of mystery, as is the common talk of the village?"

"That may possibly be his own business and none other's," said Stella, angrily.

"Why does he dress beyond his circumstances, and his mother want for comforts?"

"I guess she has all she wants, if he does dress well."

"But why should he permit the neighbors to help her to many necessary things he ought to provide? He is reproached for this. He might provide better for her by having less himself."

"All this is his own business," said Stella, impatiently.

"As long as the neighbors do so much, they become justly interested, and have a right to think and talk."

"They are meddlesome."

"Could he not sell the jewel that has lately appeared upon his shirt-front, and so provide for the mother that talk could be stopped?"

"I suppose he has a right to it. I can't see that it concerns other people."

"Only so far as it increases the contrast between his own abundance and his mother's poverty. What is his business, Stella, that provides diamonds? Can you tell me, or can any one?"

"That is his affair!"

"And yet he seems to shun what men are usually glad to name and talk about. He has business; but it is a profound secret to every one where he was born and has lived all his life."

"Because he was born and has lived here, is no reason that he should make a confidant of every gossip."

"It is no more than the natural expectation of one honest man from another, that mystery should not cloak his actions. Where all is right, there can be no reason for concealment."

"And who is to be the judge of that? Certainly not those who are predisposed to be unjust!"

"If you mean me, Stella, I am not unjust to him. You have asked me my reasons for being suspicious of Charley Ludlow, and I give them to you honestly. Though an old friend, he can not, for that, be excused more than another. If what you say of his conversation with you last night is

true as it applies to me, I have a still greater right to be critical."

"Shall I tell him your suspicions, and the reproaches with which you have just favored him?" retorted Stella, an ugly look lingering about her eyes.

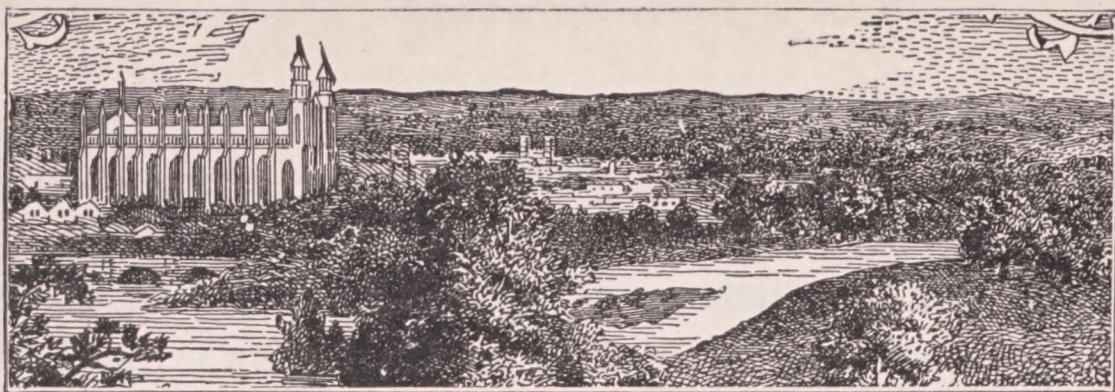
"Our conversation ought to be in confidence, I think," replied Janie, slightly confused. "Otherwise it will be a betrayal of one friend by another, and that would not be just. You have asked me for reasons that have hitherto found place only in my secret heart. That I might be just to myself, and satisfy your reproaches, I was induced to tell them; but still you can do as you please, Stella. Should he himself talk to me upon the subject, I would say what I have to you. If he is ever more to me than a friend, he must be above suspicion;" and the decision of her character and purity of motives were deeply impressed upon Stella's wavering mind. She could not help respecting Janie's honesty of purpose.

With all the doubts that had found expression in this brief but plain conversation, in which the hearts of both were revealed to each other, an intense yearning still clung to Janie that there might be extenuating circumstances she did not know. She desired to be just to him and forgiving, for the sake of the admiration she had always carried in her secret heart for him—the effect of which she now felt even in the presence of suspicion. To no one—not even her mother—had she so freely unburdened herself as to Stella now. She was perplexed at her strange situation, and oppressed by a dread that she had said too much, and altogether disappointed at the unexpected revelation of Stella's

character. Her confidence in Stella was rudely shaken, and her partial threat to betray her seemed to suddenly build up a barrier to separate their hitherto unbroken friendship.

In her heart Stella was glad that Janie had sanctioned the recital of the conversation to Mr. Ludlow. She could further her own interest and designs by doing so. She had not, at first, intended to lead Janie to an injurious betrayal of her feelings towards the man; but it had been done unexpectedly and without an effort on her part. As the facts were now her property, she resolved to use them against Janie. Thus she justified herself in the object to be gained; and when she separated from Janie with a kiss, she felt the smittings of conscience that it was a kiss of deceit.





CHAPTER IV.

CHARLEY LUDLOW.

AS unexpectedly as Charley Ludlow had appeared to Janie and Stella, a few days before, on the highway, as suddenly did he now disappear. His abrupt coming and going at long intervals had become a matter of common gossip in the village; and the widowed mother, in her abject loneliness, failed to satisfy her inquisitive friends. They thought she could, but would not. His manner also had changed, and from exuberant cheerfulness he had passed to shrinking reserve and silence. Only in the presence of Janie and Stella did he seem to awake and be like his old self; and yet different from his old self toward the two in roughness and indelicacy of actions. His was a strange and unaccountable transformation to every one. The pride of the village had become an object of suspicion.

Many weeks had passed since his sudden disappearance. Without his disturbing presence, Janie and Stella had become warm friends again, and, apparently, with the same trusting, loving companionship as of old.

It was in the fall of the year when he again appeared. Janie and her father and mother were together upon the old porch, as once before. It was in the dusk of evening when his commanding form was seen approaching from towards the river. All instantly recognized him, and Janie with a startled, uneasy look. A deep silence rested upon the little group from the moment of recognition until he stood before the gate. His sudden approach brought a tumult of emotions that started the nerves of Janie and her mother into a tremor, and they fixed their looks upon each other's faces.

He paused, and raised his silk hat with gloved hand to the little group. Mr. Allen cordially hailed and invited him to stop. He lifted the latch of the gate, the clicking sound of which seemed to grate on Janie's strained nerves from the distance, and blanched her cheeks. At his approach they all arose together to take his proffered hand. But he seemed, at the instant, indifferent to the presence of mother and father—even rudely impolite in the slighting manner of their reception.

"Ah, little Janie!" he said, coarsely, "I'm glad to see you. Pretty as ever, I see!"

But no reply was made to his uncivil remark. He had grasped her hand, and clung to it forcibly. Her face grew hot and red, and she tremblingly struggled to release it. Then she turned her full look upon him, a look that bore unmistakable signs of indignation.

"You hurt my hand!" she said, with a mist blurring her sight. "You are rough!" she added, suffering pain from her bruised sensibilities more than from the crushed hand.

"O, pardon me!" he said, with a laugh and a fixed stare

into her face that embarrassed her unaccountably; for she was not accustomed to such looks. "I thought your welcome would be a hearty one; but I see you are as cold as ever," he added, with apparent disregard of the presence of father and mother. "I took it for granted that Stella had fulfilled her promise to me," he concluded, with an air of assurance.

"I know nothing of her promise," Janie replied, with a dazed look.

The greeting to Mr. and Mrs. Allen was altogether a surprise, and they seemed to have lost words, and were dumbly silent in his presence; and, before they recovered sufficiently to speak, Mr. Ludlow again tipped his hat, saying:

"I am glad to see you all looking so well; would be glad to stop longer, but am in great haste, and must go. Good-bye for the present."

It was Mrs. Allen who broke the silence that followed long after his departure. She said, indignantly:

"Never before have I seen so great a change in an individual as appears in Charley Ludlow. Of old, he was kind and gentle and polite and respectful to me; but to-night he was bold and defiant, and almost rude, to all of us. His manner towards you, Janie, can not be tolerated," she added, with trembling lips.

Mr. Allen was struggling hard against an outburst of passion, but to the mother's last remark his stifled words found vent. With compressed lips, he exclaimed:

"He had better be more of the gentleman to her, if he knows when he is well off!" and then, thoroughly aroused, he said: "The man has the air of the saloon and gambling-

table about him. I have seen much of the world, though called a farmer, and his type of manhood can be seen any day in the city about its slums. Though his face is pretty, and hands are soft, and clothes of the latest fashion, his manners are low, and his talk bears the characteristics of a degraded life. I am more than ever persuaded that he is no fit associate for Janie. He had better keep at a respectful distance!" he concluded, with an angry, inflexible look.

"Strange!" added the mother; "he acted as if we were but rustics, without refinement. Either he is in very low society, judging us by his own associates, or so high that he looks down upon us. In either case, he is not a desirable associate for our Janie," she said, turning to her daughter, compassionately taking her little hand into her own, and fondly looking at it to discover the hurt she had complained of. "He wore a haggard look that seemed to oppress me," Mrs. Allen continued, softly stroking the hand in her own. "Though light and airy in manner, it was of a forced character. There is something wrong with him, I am sure," she concluded.

Janie had not spoken a word as yet. She sat dumb, with pensive eyes, lost in the reflections of her parents. She was smarting under the rudeness which had been offered, like a defiance of her gentle nature, for the second time. An unaccountable aversion crept in upon her feelings as she thought and listened. The silent dictation of a pure nature rose like a quiet monitor against the presence of sin and degradation. Then the echo of the heart came with the single expression at the conclusion of her mother's words:

"I do not like Charley Ludlow," she said.

For that her mother tightened her grip upon the soft hand she had been clinging to, and looked approvingly into her handsome face. An uplifting assurance passed silently from one to the other in the moment that thrilled the mother's heart with joy, and banished the presence of evil that like a dark cloud had briefly dimmed their sunlight of happiness upon this beautiful evening.

That same evening Charley and Stella were alone together in her pretty drawing-room. He could find no fault with her reception of him. It was of as warm and impulsive a character as he could desire, only he was not eager for her demonstrations of affection. His object to-night was to use her as a tool to break down Janie's indifference to himself. He imagined, by some strange infatuation, that he could use one woman to lure on another disinterestedly. He did not seem to consider that Stella could love him without the asking, or that her own desires could be used to defeat his plottings. He overlooked the fact that she was a woman of strong impulses, and would be fierce and unscrupulous with aroused jealousy. He seemed somehow to believe that she would have no interest beyond his own; and that she would, as Janie's best friend, act in his behalf.

The warm greeting had scarce ended, when he abruptly said to her, and with a manner that was an offense to her:

"You did not do as you promised me, Stella!"

She feigned not to understand; and vexed by his indifference to herself, in a tantalizing way, retorted:

"What do you mean?"

"I think you understand me, Stella," he answered, with a surly look, as if chafing under resentment.

"I can not read your thoughts. You must speak plainly," she answered, harshly.

He looked at her steadily for a moment, and would have next spoken unkindly; but in the presence of her resentful face his words failed him. He answered, bitterly:

"It does not matter. Janie displayed the same cold repulsion as usual but an hour ago, showing conclusively, to my mind, that you could not have effected much, at least. Friends usually succeed better than that," he said, reproachfully.

Stella was deeply moved by this unkind reproach, so altogether uncalled for. She was swayed in the moment by jealousy and his indifference to her own self-respect, which he seemed to ignore. Though under no obligations to him, he treated her as if he had claims upon her. It was a coarse indifference of her rights, she thought.

"I have no control over Janie's actions," she retorted, bitterly. "She is her own mistress, I suppose you know," she added.

"O yes," he replied, "and a very indifferent friend to me."

"Why should you persist in seeking a friendship that is not willingly given? She is not the only woman in the world," she said, scornfully.

"But I want *her* friendship," he eagerly replied, and almost sadly.

"And if she should never give it you—then what?"

"I don't know, Stella," he answered, dejectedly. "Perhaps I would go to the dogs then."

Stella laughed long and tantalizingly.

"That is a bright, brave saying for a man as handsome as you are!" she answered, thoughtlessly.

He turned a look upon her in the instant that made even Stella shudder. She seemed to realize that she could no longer talk to him in innocent banter as of old. She felt a strange apprehension of danger, and a fear that he no longer respected womanly freedom or modesty. She was sobered by the awakening and the new thoughts which had come to her. She understood the meaning of his former freedom of actions better now. In knowing her own heart and motives and his character, she realized that her love for him became as a guilty love—not such a love as would inspire Janie's heart. Would she give him up with this new understanding? She decided the question as soon as suggested to her mind. In her jealousy of Janie, she resolved to stand between her and Ludlow, and face the danger that so suddenly rose before her; she would rely upon her own strength of character for protection. She felt that she was not so weak a woman as Janie, and need not be governed by her scruples. In the instant she had exposed herself to the assaults of degrading influences. It did not take long thus to reason out her course of actions for the future. With a contemptuous wave of the hand, she said:

"Janie does not love you, and never will."

"Does she authorize you to say as much?" he asked, eagerly and with blanched face.

"I would not say it without."

"Then you have talked with her upon the subject. I did you an injustice by my reproaches. I thought, from your manner, you had not kept your promise. Forgive me."

"O, that is all right, Charley," Stella hastily replied; "only, do n't be so quick, in the future, to misjudge me. Remember that I usually keep my promises. I am not vacillating like Janie. I know my own mind."

"I believe you, Stella," he answered, soothingly; "but what did she say?"

"Nothing but reproaches."

"Reproaches? What were they?"

"I do n't care to repeat them, Charley. I had better not do so."

"But I wish you would, Stella; they will not hurt me. I believe I am proof against reproaches. Come!"

"And you will not be offended with me?"

"Why should I be with you, of all others? You listened to them as my defender, I know."

"Yes," Stella answered eagerly, as if grateful for the suggestion. "I did defend you. You would have no self-respect to love her after her bitter words."

"And what were they?" he insisted, suspiciously.

"Well, if you still insist, they referred to your family, your dress, your long intervals of absence, your silence as to your business affairs, and the like. She insisted that there was an air of suspicion surrounding you, and said emphatically that, until all were made clear, she would have nothing to do with you."

"O, is that all?" he answered, looking steadily into Stella's face, to read there if suspicion rested upon her mind also. "I guess my shoulders are so broad that they can bear them all," he said, with some relief in the thought that Stella retained confidence in him.

"You are less a man than I think you, to be influenced by them," answered Stella, impulsively. "I know, if I were a man, they would have no effect upon me."

"Still, it is hard to give up the love of childhood and young manhood. I have loved her, seemingly, all my life. It appears to me now that my future would be a blank without her," again forgetting Stella's reproaches, lost in the lingering heart-cravings that seemed to torture him.

Stella could scarce reply, choked by resentment that he should again express his unyielding love for Janie, and in face of the reasons she had revealed for its hopelessness. Bitterly then she replied:

"If you reach your desires you will have to change your ways, Charley Ludlow."

"How change my ways? Do you reproach me also?"

"By making a confession of all your private affairs, and by proving to her suspicious mind that you are above reproach," she answered, sneeringly.

"Still, some things are hard to give up. It may be she knows more of my life than I would have her know," he said, with an infatuation that aroused Stella's deepest anger.

"Ah! Then you do rest under suspicion! Is that your meaning?" she retorted, with quivering lips and flushed face.

"You are unreasonably fierce with me to-night, Stella. Why do you catch me up so unkindly? I am not worse than other men," he answered, as if suddenly deprived of manly courage, looking into her face with pleading eyes.

The look was too much for her. She relented at once, and soothingly answered:

"Of course not. I do n't think so, either. Only you are

so childish about that child Janie. You lose your manliness when you talk about her. I do n't like you when you talk and act thus," she said, striving to smile.

"O, do n't you turn against me also, Stella! If you should do that, after Janie, it would seem as if every cord that holds me to childhood and its happiness were broken," he cried.

"I do n't turn against you, Charley," she said, encouragingly. "I have had faith in you when that of every other one has been shaken in our village, as you know. I am not likely to suspect you so easily."

"Thank you, Stella," he replied, with a strangely guilty look. "I do not know why everybody here is against me," he added, in a shrinking, cowardly way. "I am sure I have done no one any harm. I am of age, and my own master, I believe," he said, as if in self-excuse.

"Of course you are, except in one thing. You are a slave to Janie's good looks, and would creep in the dust for her approval," Stella answered, tauntingly.

Never before had she spoken so freely to Charley as tonight. She had flattered, censured, tantalized, or abused, and, apparently, without touching his submissive mood. But, with all, had she shaken his clinging love for Janie? Again she hastened to assault his hateful perversity. She said:

"If my regard is anything to you, it can not last much longer with your meek submission to the reproaches of one who can never love you. It is too aggravating for the continuance of respect from any one. It is not manly," she said, with flashing eyes that made him cringe. He could, apparently, make no reply.

"You have, somehow, drawn me into your affairs," she continued, with excitement; "you have, in other words, made me a go-between; and when Janie has returned only bitter words of reproach and suspicion, you tamely submit, and still want my respect and friendship. You but trifle with me, and must not expect it."

Had her words the desired effect? Eagerly she watched the lines of his face for the assurance she craved. She was encouraged by the look of humility that he returned for her bitter words. It was a faint indication to her yearning heart that she did have a strong hold upon him. It would grow, she thought, as Janie's hold should weaken, and at last be paramount. Then she said, as if in defiance of his sentiment:

"Let us drop the subject here, and never refer to Janie again. I have little patience left for either of you. I fear I shall doubt your self-respect next, and then I will be the last one of your old friends to leave you."

To Stella, this was the most important day of her life. She had awaked to a knowledge of her own powers and resources, and had felt a strange infatuation in the use of deceit and untruthfulness. They were new resources, and had stood her well to-night. All scruples of conscience seemed to have been forgotten in her blind infatuation. She felt a pleasure in an object to be gained, and a great satisfaction in its pursuit by methods that were concealed from others. She had awaked to the sense of being important to one she had loved, though he did not return that love as yet. It was the hope that she would supplant another, and gain for herself at last the coveted prize, that fixed her eager thoughts and desires

upon the future. She knew positively that much of the work had been accomplished to-night. When the full possession should come, she would be happy, she thought. The end would justify the means.

While Stella's love was earnest and doubtless sincere, it was the beautiful face and form that now attracted, rather than the sterling qualities of manhood. To-night, when secrecy and mystery surrounded him in her presence, and she realized that he offered no defense against Janie's suspicious accusations, still she was blinded to all for the sake of the beautiful face which looked upon her. It was an infatuation of the eyesight and the passions rather than respect for the noble, godlike qualities of the soul of man that may shine from unshapely faces, and move the world by pure and exalted impulses. It was the lovely exterior only of which she thought. He was of a mold to please the feminine eye that would be blind to an analysis of the true demands of perfect manhood.

Before their final separation for the night, Stella realized, with exalted happiness, that she had gained an ascendancy over him—that her influence was dominating by the force of her strong will. Was he worthy of her? was a question she failed to pause and consider.





CHAPTER V.

A TOWN MEETING.

FOR a long time the quiet village had been disturbed by occasional depredations. Stores and private residences had been burglarized, and of late such visitations had grown in frequency. Suspicion could attach to no one living in the town or neighborhood; and none could think that the quiet, peaceful seclusion of the place, where all were Arcadian in temperament and innately law-abiding, could germinate so rank a growth as a thief or burglar. But the presence of such an evil one had become an assured fact, and steps were to be taken at last for self-protection.

A mystery clung to the depredators; for the evil was confined to this particular place, and to such times when all spasmodic efforts at detection had ceased. The acts and intentions of the people were evidently known to the depredators, and visitations came most certainly to those most active in the movements of self-protection. There seemed to be method in all such movements, as if one inspired the other. As this impression grew into an assurance, the mystery and excite-

ment increased; and no longer could a passive acquiescence in the outrage be endured.

Circulars had been posted, calling the citizens to a meeting at the town hall. Few were absent on the appointed night. The meeting chanced to be upon the evening following the conversation of Stella and Charley, as narrated in the preceding chapter. Charley was in the hall, and with him a stranger, not before seen in the village, and unknown to all. The two sat in the extreme rear of the house, seemingly as interested listeners, though at times they were seen to exchange significant looks, but without thought to those about them.

Mr. Allen had been chosen to preside; and, in a few terse sentences, he explained the object of the meeting. One and another then expressed their views and offered suggestions; and though the emotions of the villagers at last grew into intense excitement, no one had offered a motion to shape their conflicting suggestions into definiteness of action. None cared, seemingly, to take the responsibility, because of the dread that some had expressed to-night of a visitation from the enemy. The fact of such former retaliation had been fully pointed out by victims to-night. They resembled a timid herd wavering undecidedly for want of a leader.

At last one of the citizens arose from the back of the hall, and addressing the Chair, said:

“MR. CHAIRMAN,—We have heard from almost every one of our citizens relative to our village trouble. We have with us, to-night, one who is almost a stranger—one whom we formerly greatly respected, and whose knowledge of the world, I think, could be of use to us now—I mean Mr.

Charles Ludlow. Would the Chair kindly ask his views upon our trouble?"

During this brief address, Charley flushed, and great drops of sweat poured from his face, and he trembled perceptibly. He arose hastily as if to leave the hall by the open door near at hand; but his friend restrained and spoke a few whispered words into his ear, which caused him to resume his seat.

When Mr. Allen, therefore, asked him to gratify his townsmen, he slowly arose, and stood before them, an object of the deepest embarrassment. All eyes were fixed upon him, and the suspicions that gossip had quietly indulged in the privacy of homes took shape and moved many a heart.

He was disconcerted, and stammered that "he had been so much away from the village that their affairs were scarcely understood by him; that he did not know of their real needs, only as he had listened to the complaints of the night; that the only thing that could be done, as a solution of the difficulty, was to appoint patrolmen for their security."

The single minute occupied in saying this little was enough to impress upon the minds of all present his utter insincerity and lack of sympathy toward the people of his old home and youth, and intensify the uncomfortable suspicions that had lurked in the minds of all.

His suggestion was immediately acted upon, and patrolmen were appointed. As this was being done, Charley and his friend quietly walked out of the room, and disappeared, for long weeks after, to every eye that had looked upon them that night.

After the adjournment of the meeting, the subject of the

night seemed to be overlooked in the strange mystery that Ludlow's actions had inspired; and many lingered about the hall in suppressed tones of conversation over his presence, his absence, and his shrinking manner, all unaccountable.

Janie and her mother were alone in the little library to-night, that was cozy and neat and beautifully ornamented with delicate needle-work and water-color paintings, the work of Janie's hands. A vase of delicate flowers glowed in blended colors beneath the gleam of the lamplight that was like a lovely face full of smiles as it rested between them. An air of indescribable harmony pervaded the room, sheltering now two peaceful hearts that could no more be analyzed than the human emotions uniting mother and daughter in unspeakable affection. It was a lovely retreat, untainted by strife. The two were patiently waiting the father's return from the citizens' meeting, which was of so unusual a character that it had caused a ripple of excitement upon the placid heart of the village; and every wife and daughter, like Janie and her mother, was waiting for the news, as if of national magnitude and importance. Janie had read, and sewed, and talked, and played upon the piano, and was now again beside her mother in conversation.

"The meeting must be of great importance that father is so late," said the mother, at length, as she looked at the clock and saw that it was near eleven.

"It is so seldom the men have anything to call them together, it must prove the old adage that big bodies move slowly, the whole village being out, as I imagine it is to-night. It must be a ponderous body of men to govern!" said Janie, pleasantly. "I wonder who has presided?"

"Your father, very likely. He is usually called upon at such times."

"How strange that our little village should be selected for outrages that have made it necessary for such a meeting?" said Janie, thoughtfully.

"It is strange indeed," assented the mother.

"It can not be because we are so near the great city. There are so many other villages around it that, if plunder were the only object, we would not be alone selected for persecution. As there is method in the work, so certain individuals are selected, and always those who are bold enough to denounce the actors. I have been in dread, of late, lest we should fall under the ban, as father has been outspoken," said Janie, with a timid, anxious look. "I wish papa were home now?" she added, apprehensively.

"O, there is no danger now, Janie, when the village is aroused, and all its men are awake and abroad," answered the mother, assuringly. "Such men are usually cowards, and work under cover of darkness. No one will stir to-night in the bright moonlight that is so like the day."

Janie's fears were allayed by her mother's assurances; and she again turned to her piano to while away the waiting moments of the father's return. She had a sweet, well-trained voice; for nothing had been spared in its cultivation more than in her education. She was a beautiful, priceless exotic of the country, nurtured under the refining influences and advantages of the city so near them. Her spiritual nature could best live and develop in the presence of musical, artistic, and mental refinements. She rather beautified them, than they her; and her exquisite grace of figure made

up a perfect womanly entirety that was peculiar, and attractive to all, in her distinct individuality. Though of the country, she was not a part of the dull and rough toil that besets the lives of those who fill the position of farmers' wives and daughters. Such a life would have broken her sensitive spirit. She was a true child of nature in her absorbing love of every object of nature about her—the fields, woods, the varied crops, the weeds incumbering the fence-corners, the clouds, the glistening snow-covered landscapes of winter. Everything sang songs to her delicate and impressible sensibilities, as the birds that were fearless of her presence, sang to her.

An unending source of undefinable joy lingered about the hidden undercurrent of her being—a pleasure the heart can not know where the eyes are blind to the speaking, thrilling beauties of nature.

She sang lovely selections in the midnight stillness of the little room, that thrilled her mother's sensitive heart and banished all earthly fear. She arose from the stool, and reached over to the end of the piano for a selection of music; and in the instant sank to the floor with a quick cry of pain, and was silent. She had fainted.

The terrified mother sprang to her side, and in a frenzy gathered her as a child to her bosom in a shower of tears. She agonized over the white, deathlike face, and the limp and motionless form in her lap. She was beside herself in the sudden, strange, harrowing bewilderment of the moment; and she poured upon her tender caresses, mingled with tears, rather than physical efforts of resuscitation. It was as if death had suddenly swooped down upon its tender victim,

and ruthlessly torn from her clinging, loving heart-affection all that life held dear. Thus she was agonizing when a faint sigh seemed to escape the deathlike lips; and then a faint flutter of the heart throbbed against her hand; then, at last, the lids of her eyes lifted; and presently, in a faint voice, she asked why the mother drew her so closely to her breast. For answer the dazed mother showered kisses upon her soft face and lips, and drew her still closer to her beating heart, assured that she was her own living child again. From despair to hope was like a sudden torture and ecstasy of the soul that was more than human strength could bear; and so, in the reaction, the mother was helpless also.

Thus the father found them as he entered the room unannounced. He comprehended the situation at a glance, and in his practical way speedily restored both to conscious helpfulness again. One lay now upon the easy lounge, and the other reclined in the soft rocking-chair, that their strained nerves might be controlled and strength regained.

"Tell us, Janie, the cause of your sudden faint," the mother at last said, bracing herself in weakness in the chair. "I have never had so great a shock. What was it?"

"When I reached out for a selection of music that lay on the end of the piano by the window, I saw a man's face in a half mask pressed against the pane of glass. In the moment that I looked at him he darted away around the corner of the house. I saw it all at a glance, and then lost consciousness. His presence was so startling and unexpected that, with the dread of evil that has come to the village, and the consciousness that bad men are about, I suppose I was overcome," Janie explained in a languid, faltering way.

"What did the man look like?" asked the father.

"He was large and well dressed."

"You did not make out the color of his clothes, either, I suppose. It could not be expected," he said, as if his mind was pursuing a phantom that had suddenly taken definite shape.

"Only that they were dark."

"Dark? You are sure of that?"

"Yes; for the moonlight, as you see, is almost as clear as day, and he was plainly defined before the window."

"Did you notice any one with him?"

"No."

"Strange things have come to our quiet and hitherto undisturbed little place; and strange thoughts are shaping themselves also in the minds of even the dullest of our people," said Mr. Allen, reflectively.

"Have you suspicions, at last, that point to any single individual?" asked Mrs. Allen, with awakened curiosity. "It may be we have all a lurking fear that we dread to name."

"For many reasons I would not care to express my thoughts to-night," Mr. Allen answered, looking significantly at the wife as a silent protest against the further probing of his suspicions; and, to divert his wife's mind from personal direction of the subject, he referred to the meeting, and talked over the many things that had been said, and by whom. In his narration he came at last to the little address of Charley Ludlow, and thoughtlessly referred to him before becoming conscious of the fact. Then it was too late to recall his name. He spoke of the manner of its delivery, and of its impression upon the townsmen, who had dumbly list-

ened to it, and then of his sudden disappearance from the hall, and of his evident indisposition to mingle with his old friends. "All this," he explained, "had been talked over, after the meeting, with as absorbing an interest as the question under discussion previously, leaving in the minds of all an undefined dread that closed every lip against the utterance of a name. And that is what I feel now," said Mr. Allen, in conclusion. "I don't like to speak a name under the circumstances. I would prefer definite proof before accusing a townsman of crime."

"Yes, I thought as much!" quickly replied Mrs. Allen. "I think we understand each other without being unjust to any one."

"You are not speaking openly," said Janie, who had been a silent listener until now. "I have something I want to say that hurts me more than my present weakness—something that did more than all else to cause my sudden faint. It was more than the fright. If I do not name it, I can not sleep to-night," she added, in distress.

"What is it, my dear?" anxiously asked the mother.

"O, the shadow of a fear that I may be wrong, and do an injustice to one I would shield and protect, restrains me," she said, as the tears started to her eyes. "I do not want to think evil of any one—one especially with whom I have been raised," she said, falteringly.

The mother and father understood her meaning, and divined her thoughts clearly. The suspicions of all were alike, though no name had been spoken; and the same dread sorrow had awakened to all hearts in the little room.

"To whom do you refer, Janie?" asked the father, coax-

ingly. "It can do no harm to speak the name now among ourselves. We all think alike, I am sure."

"It will be better," added the mother; "in the fact that thus our burdens will be lifted, and we can better understand ourselves."

Then there was silence for a time, in which Janie lay motionless upon the lounge, her face buried in her handkerchief, her silent tears choking her speech. She was fighting with the secret love that had held her young womanhood enchained. She was now struggling to break the bonds. She could not love and doubt the character, she reasoned; but could pity. So it was pity also with which she was contending. Confidence had been roughly overturned, and its disappointment entered wildly into the conflict. Her whole life was brought out of the past by a strange, quick impulse of the memory; and hopes and air-castles that she had builded in her day-dreams were crumbling—all crumbling before her mental gaze at this moment. The future seemed to open before her as a new life, darkened and saddened by a deep shadow. To speak the name in her thoughts in such a connection would be to banish the past forever, she felt, and begin life anew. The heart demanded the complete effacement of his presence.

She was aroused from her reverie by the touch of her mother's soft hand, who had drawn her chair to her side and was silently commiserating her. She looked at her mother through tear-bedimmed eyes, with a faint smile upon her sad and gentle face. The dumb, questioning look of the mother seemed to arouse her faltering spirits; and with an effort she arose from her reclining position, and sat up before her

parents. She had resolved to be true to her impulses and the unswerving purity of her nature, and by the help of her mother's soft hand, that seemed to give her courage in its clinging warmth, she said at last:

"I am sure I recognized Charley Ludlow at the window. I knew him by his general appearance in the bright moonlight, though the face was partly hid. It could have been none other," she said deliberately, sorrowfully.

A deep silence settled like a dense shadow upon every heart, with Janie's words. Suspicions had been confirmed; and the specter of a mother's sorrow over the wreck of a cherished boy tortured their hearts as they sat silently and thought. Along with the mother's sorrow came a still deeper trouble to Mr. and Mrs. Allen in the presence of their own child, their only tender plant of life. They knew that the village had set the two apart for each other, as by common consent; and that, in their young anticipations, they had accepted the trust of each other's lives without opposition. It had become an accepted fact, without the need of solemn plighting. Now Mr. and Mrs. Allen were struggling with the dread that the heart of their Janie would be terribly wounded. But an encouraging thought came to Mrs. Allen's mind as she recalled the feeling of repulsion his actions of late had aroused in Janie's mind. In her innate demand for honor and purity, where her gentle nature would suffer pain and death with anything less, she felt that an antidote was offered against the blight of sorrow and disappointment that had presented itself so suddenly.

Mrs. Allen now referred to this delicately, hoping to arouse the sentiment for the sake of the present ordeal; but

the task was not so difficult as she had expected. Janie had already decided the question. Her decision had been reached by the change of his treatment of her. Her sensitive organization had writhed under the torture of his disrespect, and coarse language, and impudent looks—all so new and pronounced of late. They had wrung her heart, and at the same time snapped, one after another, the ties that had bound him to her, until now little remained but pity, which lingered like a strange infatuation. These facts all appeared to the encouraged and reassured hearts of the loving parents, as they lingered upon the details of the confidential talk following Janie's statement. It ended, at last, in Janie's firm assurance that Charley Ludlow had passed out of her life.

It was midnight before they separated; and then, with a calm contentment lingering about their hearts like the refinements of the perfect life beyond earthly degradation; and it became as a silent benediction that lifted them above the material things that thieves can steal.





CHAPTER VI.

JANIE AND STELLA.

A FEW days after the midnight apparition, Janie and Stella were again together, walking along the country road leading down the hillside. The last time they had leisurely sauntered along this dusty road was in the early spring, and then their arms were entwined about each other lovingly, and nothing material had intruded to dim the bright sunlight of their girlish affection or confidence. Now it was the late fall of the year, and they were walking apart with sober faces, a shadow clinging to their burdened hearts. It was but a few brief months of interval, and yet long enough for strange awakenings to both. Neither Janie nor Stella felt or thought as they had done in the beautiful springtime; and their conversation was now listless, and broken by many intervals of silence. Stella felt a reproachful conviction that a grim secret was separating her from Janie, in which a consciousness of deceit obtruded. Janie realized in her sensitive nature that Stella was changed, and that her loving tenderness had strangely departed.

Their silent heart-thoughts, on this beautiful Indian summer afternoon, partook of the somber-hued face of nature, that a few chilling frosts had changed from green to livid tints.

In her silent moments Janie's eyes wandered among the russet meadows and the barren hillsides, and she looked lingeringly upon the golden showers of falling leaves. The falling leaves were, like her own hopes, dropping silently before blighting adversity, that, like the chilling frost, had touched her heart, and left her thoughts somehow in the sear and yellow leaf. The bright sunbeams caressed her cheeks to-day with light and cooling pressure, and a vague sigh seemed to pervade the air for the departed glory of summer, and for the approach of winter, whose breath had blasted already the fair faces of her beautiful flowers.

A deep sadness lingered about the hazy atmosphere, that drew a veil between her eyes and the distant perspective, and lingered in the heart, and left a mist before her future.

Janie referred to the gloomy sentiment that the season had aroused, in a pensive way. She thought to touch Stella's heart by the emotions she felt but could scarce describe. Stella listened without interest or reply. Then as Janie lapsed again into silence before her unappreciative manner, a cloud of impatience crossed Stella's face, and she spoke abruptly:

"You grow more and more like the seasons of the year in your moods. Pity but you were a flower, rather than a woman; then you would be a part of nature as you now seem a child of the changing seasons. You would occupy a more natural place in nature."

This was said with a voice that sounded harsh and acri-

monious to Janie. It was a meaningless complaint; but it changed the current of Janie's thoughts, as if she had been suddenly turned about in her gaze from somber hues to resurrected beauties.

"After the sleep of winter, the heart of nature will throb again, and gentle showers will bring life back to the lovely faces that are drooping now on blighted stems," she thought, hopefully.

"I wish you knew what I feel, Stella!" she replied, with an earnest and plaintive voice.

"Perhaps no one but yourself can know that, for there is no one like you," she replied, impatiently. "The realities of life are, seemingly, of less moment than mist, and haze, and dead leaves, and barren fields, and flowerless stalks. O, you are so trying!" she concluded, walking on alone for a time.

Janie followed slowly, wondering still more why Stella had become so impatient with her. "Perhaps I am moody and uncompanionable," she complained to herself. Then, as a whisper, her eager yearning for the love of her friend breathed from her lips: "As the sun in its glowing warmth is comforting to my physical senses, so is the love of my friends to my burdened heart. Stella must not dislike me."

"Stella," she called, tenderly.

Stella paused, and turned to her in a speechless way.

"Wait for me, please. Do n't be so quiet."

"I do n't want to talk about gloomy things," she said, petulantly. "I want to be rid of such thoughts. They harass me."

"Well: I will shut my eyes to everything about me, and

think only of you," Janie answered, taking Stella's hand in her own, and continuing their slow and aimless walk.

"Are you ever a prey to somber thoughts, Stella? I thought you too happy for that," Janie said, looking earnestly into Stella's face.

"I am that now," Stella answered, harshly.

"I am sorry," Janie said, sympathetically. "I hope not because of anything I have done."

"No; and yet I am made unhappy, because I am dragged into your affairs against my wishes."

"My affairs, Stella? I can not understand."

"As they apply to Charley Ludlow," Stella answered by a struggle.

"Please be plain with me, Stella," said Janie, feeling herself trembling before her friend.

"He insists that I can make you love him; and that it is, in some way, my business to do so."

"But he has passed entirely out of my life, Stella. What he can not now do, you certainly can not," Janie answered, with a calm look that could not be misinterpreted. "Our former conversation, in the garden, was intended to be clear upon that point," she said.

"But he will not accept your reproaches. He clings to the delusion that you do not know your own mind long at a time. He fancies that I am a necromancer to charm away your whims," she said, with a bitter laugh.

"My determination is irrevocable," answered Janie, with a decision, of which Stella would have thought her incapable. "He can be no more to me hereafter than an indifferent acquaintance, if that."

Stella looked away from Janie, not wishing to betray her own exultant feelings, lest her heart-thoughts should be exposed. She was playing a game with Janie and Charley both, that neither could understand; and yet working out her own designs, as she thought, with a magician's power and skill. As Janie had spoken, now, with even more of an uncompromising assurance than in the garden, she could safely play the part of mediator, she thought, and thus pose in the light of disinterested friendship, and be valued by both without reproaches, whatever the result. It was a self-satisfying thought to her. Her few trials at deceit had been so satisfying that now they became a pleasure sought by preference. Is it not so with temptation always? It is in the yielding to it that it becomes alluring. So Stella now toyed with the sentiment that at first had touched her conscience with smiting reproaches.

"Come, Janie," she said, with more of a manner of warmth and affection than before to-day; "you must not be unjust in your judgments of Charley. As a friend to both of you, I can say that you ought to return his faithful love. He is worthy of you."

Janie shook her head, silently.

"You may think yourself better than he, Janie, and still be wrong," a shade of her former coldness returning.

"I make no such claim."

"Nothing heretofore offered will justify your tormenting stubbornness. It can only be caprice."

Janie was momentarily disconcerted by Stella's aggravating manner, more than by her words. Seemingly she would not be turned from her irritable way. In its presence

Janie became unspeakably unhappy, but kindly she replied:

"You are unjust to me, Stella."

"Rather, it is you who are doubly unjust to yourself, and Charley Ludlow as well."

"Let me explain, Stella. I want to be just to every one, as you know. You are inclined, of late, to see only occasion for censure in me. It is so strange."

"But that is no explanation. A counter charge has no reference to our subject," Stella answered, with an exultant look at Janie's embarrassment. Then, to torture her still more, she unfeelingly said: "But it is just like you—inconsistent as well as unjust."

Janie met Stella's stony look with one of surprise. It grew, as Stella gazed upon her, into a placid rigidness of features, upon which an expression of gentle tenderness rested, like a halo reflected from the pure heart within. Stella mutely wondered at the change, and involuntarily exclaimed:

"You look like the narcissus, just awaked from the chill of winter!"

Janie's face broke into a smile with the delicate reference, so altogether unexpected, and she, impulsively answered:

"Do not let us be harsh with each other, Stella; for it is useless to say anything more about Charley Ludlow. Our lives have grown apart by slow degrees during the past months, and events have occurred lately that have suddenly opened a deep gulf between us, which can never be bridged. My resolution is final and irrevocable."

To Janie's intrepid words were added a play of emotions that lingered about her beautiful features, and made her even more lovely than ever before to Stella. Stella was not, in the moment, jealous of this glowing beauty, lost, as she was, in the satisfying assurance that Charley could be none other than her own henceforth. She felt an assurance of possession in him that she had not known before. She had played with Janie's feelings, and had tortured or pleased at her will. It was delightful. There arose to her mind Janie's last words, "a late occurrence" and "a gulf."

"You said something had happened lately."

"Yes."

"Something I do not know?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" Stella asked, eagerly.

"I had intended never mentioning it; but somehow you seem to bring out even my secret thoughts as they apply to Charley."

Stella laughed as if her self-pride had been deeply gratified. "I did not know before that I had a controlling influence over other natures. You flatter me! But what of the occurrence?"

"Have you seen Charley since the citizen's meeting?" Janie asked, guardedly.

"No; I have not, indeed!"

"Well, he was at that meeting and made a brief speech; and then suddenly disappeared from it; and then, in a mask, appeared before our library window in the glare of the full moon. I was so overcome with affright that I fainted," Janie said slowly, and with a look of unhappiness.

In an instant Stella was convulsed with indignation. A deep flush spread over her face, that seemed to invade the eyes, and creep down her shapely neck beneath the folds of her dress, that rose and fell with hurried breaths. She seemed to struggle with herself for utterance.

"Do you now insinuate, in addition to your other bitter reproaches, that Charley Ludlow is the thief who has been harassing our village of late? For shame! It is an indignity unworthy of you! Pity but he could be here to defend himself! It is a stab in the back! I did not think you capable of such—" And she paused, as if halting on the edge of a precipice, before making the final leap into the gulf of disrupted friendship.

Janie stood motionless, as if awaiting calmly the dread announcement that would doom their strained friendship to a rude severance. But Stella did not speak the word; her momentary pause had given time for a second thought. Instead she tremblingly said:

"It was but the specter of your morbid suspicions."

"No, Stella; I was not mistaken."

"O, I forgot. You could not be! It would not be possible for you to be mistaken!" Stella replied, bitterly.

"Though his face was hid, his form betrayed him; and to my quick glance in the clear moonlight, he stood revealed before me in the familiarity of my lifelong acquaintanceship. My heart could easily look through the mask to his shrinking face and cowering conscience," Janie replied, calmly.

"And all this was done in the instant of fainting. Wondrous powers of intuition and divination!" retorted Stella, with a look of hate. "You should pose for second sight."

Stung by the bitter reproach, Janie, in her effort to be calm, answered with a struggle:

"All came to me in an instant, Stella; and more than the presence of the man—my confirmed suspicions that his past actions were a reproach, unnerved me, and I lost myself in the shock. The faint came after the quick operations of the mind," she anxiously explained.

"O yes! A very clear explanation indeed! A very satisfactory one—perhaps—to yourself! You would find it difficult, however, to make others believe your unjust suspicions—the persecution of an old friend."

"I am not persecuting."

"O no; you could not! Excuse me! I forgot that it was to you I am talking! *You* could not persecute! What do you call injuring one's character by suspicions?" asked Stella, turning a fierce look upon Janie.

"Again, Stella, I am dealing with facts—not suspicions," she pleaded, as against Stella's unrelenting reproaches. "You will find that I am doing him no injustice, in the future. I will leave all to that."

Janie was not the equal of Stella in a battle of words. She could not deal with bitter reproaches; but aimed to subdue herself, and be just. She realized her inequality of position now, for the reason that Stella would not credit her statements, or believe that anything but unreasoning prejudice had moved her. Stella had blindly championed Charley's conduct; and it was plain that, though a voice from another world should proclaim the facts, she would not believe. Janie felt, therefore, that she could do no more than rest now under Stella's reproaches, patiently awaiting the

stern confirmation of the future. But it was harrowing that their long friendship should now be suddenly disrupted. Janie clung to their girlish and lifelong affection, and her heart was storm-tossed with emotions in the presence of what seemed to await her.

As by common consent both lapsed now into deepest silence, a prey to conflicting thoughts. Then Stella assumed an air of bold defiance. Her hardened moral sensibilities, the acquirement of a few brief months of toying with sin, had blinded her to the purity and chastity of the gentle heart of her friend.

"You have, in the years past, encouraged Charley to love you," she said, bitterly. "He has loved you, not doubting the sincerity of your actions. Through some sentimental whim you now cast him off, as if a thing of degradation. Your actions have sent him into a downward course, if it be true that he is pursuing evil, which I do not believe. It is you who are responsible for his life," Stella said, with reproachful looks added to her bitter taunts.

"I have no words of defense against your reproaches, Stella," Janie answered. "You have heard my reasons for not loving him. You know we have never been plighted. You know that his moral responsibility is to his God, and that the suspicions of his friends antedate my change of heart towards him. I owe something to my own character that can not be intrusted to his changed actions. To be worthy of a good woman's love he ought to be above reproach. That is the way to merit loyal love—not to pursue evil first, and then excuse his acts by hiding behind an unmanly statement that he is justified by the lack of a woman's

love. He makes himself unworthy of it. Let every man first merit what he seeks; for that is the honorable way."

Janie spoke so calmly that Stella was confused by the conviction her words had forced upon her. She could not reason from such a view of her friend's actions. She was excited, and grew momentarily more defiant of Janie's friendship, which had hitherto constrained her words to a degree.

"It is you who are unworthy of him! He would but waste himself upon your cold heart. You have not the trusting warmth of nature to help any one. I can testify to that," said Stella, with a look of contempt towards her friend. "I will love him, and give what you do not possess—a trustful heart. I will lift him out of the mire into which your unjust suspicions have plunged him. I love him as you can not love any one—with my whole heart;" and then, with a reckless exposure of herself, said, with an intense, eagerness of manner that had never before appeared to Janie: "I have loved him for years, and have never intended that he should be yours!"

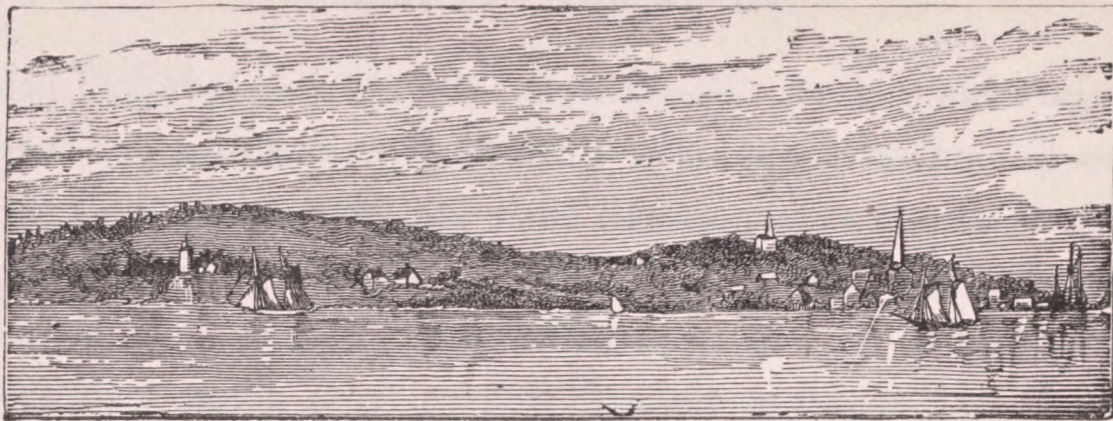
Stella had spoken under the unguarded impulse of passion. Her words could not be recalled. She was even indifferent as to their effect, knowing that Janie did not now stand between her love. With a mist before her eyes, and a tremor of her uplifted hand, she defiantly continued:

"Your friendship to me is no longer a matter of the least consideration. I can do without it! I don't want it!" and, with a look that long after stared Janie in the face, she left the side of her friend and walked away alone.

Janie was paralyzed for a time in the realization of Stella's deceitfulness, her undisguised hatred, and defiant

declaration of love. She felt that their girlish love had been rudely shattered upon the unworthy actions of a childhood friend; and that henceforth their pathways must be apart. It was a final step. She could not do other than she had done, and be true to her womanhood. Her head sank upon her breast, and hot tears flowed as from a fount to wash away the pain and heal the wound that Stella had made.





CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSIONS REACHED.

THE sighing winds and chilling air of bleak November had deepened the somber tones of leafless nature. The meteorological forces of the extremes of north and south contended for the mastery in this median latitude, and human nature shivered in the varying changes the while. Through some long winters the soft airs of the sunny South prevailed that banished ice and cold with gentle puffs of grateful heat. At other times the biting, roaring winds of the frigid North plunged upon the battle-ground, and swept every soft breath far into its own stronghold of the tropics, and reveled in icy fetters. The present promised such a winter. Winds and snow and cold had invaded the Ohio Valley early, and with resistless force.

Janie felt the chilling touch in her sensitive nature, and through the windows of her home looked longingly upon the bleak landscape that even now had a strange fascination ; and in her heart felt the still more chilling touch of blighted affec-

tions, and through the windows of the soul gazed longingly upon its withering desolation. She had for the first time lost the love of a dear friend, and the vacant place in her heart was an aching void. Her thoughts partook of the somber season in their gloomy impersonation of nature's dreary features. She was thoughtfully pensive in the recollections her memory ever recalled of the waywardness of a childhood companion—one whom she had once loved, but who was now unworthy, and a menace to womanly purity. She thought of the deceitful treachery of another childhood friend, who had betrayed friendship for a tainted love that promised only unhappiness and lifelong wretchedness. She could not shield those friends now from trouble, as she craved to do, her thoughts picturing the chilling blasts of winter tearing at the green verdure of their hearts. In bitter anguish she agonized since their feet were already treading the slippery path of sin, where remorse and sorrow only awaited them. And so the winter's gloom and her heart-sorrows left her gentle spirit anxious and oppressed. All that was left to her were the prayers she daily offered for them to the God whose face she ever beheld shining through her beloved nature.

Janie and Stella had never spoken since their sad separation on the dusty roadside. Stella had passed her upon the street, but unnoticed, and with a face of unrelenting hatred. To Janie, this was hard to bear in her forgiving disposition, and in the assurance that she had not embittered Stella's heart intentionally. She could not look into her old friend's heart and read there the motives, or behold the tumult of desires that had controlled her actions. But she, in time,

accepted the new condition, and ceased to look into the passing face for a relenting forgiveness, the hope of which she had long clung to.

Janie was living a life of still closer relationship with her mother now, who knew her daughter's secret thoughts as by a subtle intuition. She sheltered her heart from trouble, and guided her spirit by gentle words of consolation and encouragement, and nurtured her with the tenderness of a delicate plant; but she could not ward off unseen trials. Others awaited her which her tender solicitude could not foresee.

In the dusk of one of those gloomy days, Janie was returning from a lengthened visit to one of her friends. She thought nothing of the darkness that had closed about her, nor of the deserted streets, from which the cold night air had driven every one to the shelter of the fireside. Leisurely she pursued her way in the dim glare of fitful streams of feeble light that looked through windows from shaded lamps within. Before a lonely vacant lot that widely separated two humble homes, she was suddenly and abruptly confronted by a man, whose face was half-concealed by a soft hat that was drawn down over his eyes and the upper part of the face. He seemed to stagger before her as he roughly accosted her by name.

"Ah, Janie, my dear, I—I'm so glad to see you! Shake hands, pet!" he said, with leering eyes close to her own. She felt his foul breath in her face, and shudderingly shrank away from him.

"None of that, now, dear! You must listen to me!" he exclaimed, taking hold of her arm to detain her. "I—I

want to talk to you, pet, and have an understanding. You know who I am, my little sweetheart," he added, laughing in a maudlin, drunken way.

"Let me go, Charley Ludlow!" she pleaded, piteously.

"No. You've got to hear me, now. You've been cold and slighting long enough. I have claims on you, and I—I'm going to press them now. Do you hear?" he said roughly, tottering before her upon his unsteady feet.

"If you must talk to me, meet me like a gentleman at my home!" gasped Janie, tremblingly.

"No! Right here—here is the best place! Janie Allen, you know I love you; I can not live without you! You have got to be my dear, dear little wife! Do you hear?" and in a rude laughter he lost his hold of her arm.

In the instant she started to run, but he quickly detected the movement and caught her dress.

"Now, look here, none of that! none of that! Not so fast. Do n't be afraid of your old sweetheart. I won't hurt you. I want an understanding, that's what I want!"

Janie stood trembling before him. She had forgotten to cry aloud in her fright. Instead she pleaded:

"O, let me go to my home, Charley Ludlow! If you care for me, let me go, please!"

But he only tightened his grip, and with his released hand sought to take her own; but she struggled against his approach until he desisted.

"Come now, Janie," he said coaxingly, "do n't be afraid of me, dear. I won't hurt you, you timid little thing. I love you, and would die for you!" he exclaimed, with tears starting from his liquor-relaxed eyelids.

"If you love me, let me go!" Janie said, with more decision, in the encouragement his drunken words had given that he would not do her violence.

"Yes, dear ; you may go when you say you will be my little wife," he answered, with a renewed effort of repulsive affection.

"Though you kill me, I would never do so! I scorn you, drunken, degraded man that you prove yourself! If you have one spark of manhood left, for your poor mother's sake, let me go, and reform your ways! I would die before I would have anything to do with you!" Janie said, as if a torrent of indignation had burst its bonds.

He was sobered for the moment by her unexpected words.

"O! that is your conclusion, is it? and that is the way you return my love?" he said, almost fiercely. "You will ruin me if you cast me off. I have no other hope."

"And you would drag others down to your mire of sin!" Janie said, with fierce indignation. "A man that can not respect his widowed mother, can have respect for no other woman on earth, and is not deserving of any. Take your hand from my dress!" she said, in perfect forgetfulness of self, and with such a commanding voice that he instinctively obeyed. He was cowed by her decision of character, and her reference to his mother, which was like a stunning blow in the face

He stood before her dazed in the drunken self-conviction to which her brave words had condemned him. He made no effort to detain her as she rapidly fled from him. She had strength to reach her home and open the door, and then sank at her mother's feet speechless and breathless.

It was some time before she could tell the particulars to her father and mother. It was done in broken language and distressing sobs. When the father realized the full force of the insult thus offered to his daughter, he hastily buttoned his great coat about him and quickly fled into the darkness. Vainly he wandered through the silent and deserted streets of the village, overlooking not even an alleyway. He called at the lonely widow's home, and asked for the son; but the haggard face sitting there before the embers of a fire, could give but a dumb reply as she silently shook her head to his inquiry. Her heart was breaking in the solitude of her room, and the desolation of crushed hopes that she had cherished above discouragement. Late in the night Mr. Allen returned to his home, disappointed that the object of his solicitude had eluded him.

Ludlow stood motionless, watching Janie's flight, and in bewilderment thought of her purity, for which he even now had a profound respect, and realized that she had finally and forever passed beyond his reach. It was a deep sorrow that lingered in the conviction that his only anchor had gone, and that he was now adrift helplessly on the wild waves of sin. A reckless abandonment of feeling swept over him in his silent reverie, that fairly aroused him from his drunken imbecility, restoring him to his senses again. In his awakening moments he understood that he had forever compromised himself, and that no explanation could atone for the brutal exhibition that had exposed the low condition to which he had sunk, even in his own estimation. His true character was at last known to the only one of earth whom he respected—the one to whom he would not have so

appeared. With a deep-drawn sigh he relaxed all hold upon the past, and wept—man as he was—bitter tears. They were the last traces of his former manhood that flared up for a moment, before extinction. With the sorrow came a thought of Stella. It was like a faint ray of light breaking through the black gloom. He halted in his self-torture, and pondered the thought that, though all others of his childhood memories had turned their faces against him, she alone clung to him, and offered a trace of love and respect. But the thought brought no heartfelt pleasure. It was something he had not sought and did not cherish. He would go to her, however, as a solace against his bitter self-reproaches. From the one, of whose love and respect he now felt unworthy, he would go to the other who inspired neither respect nor offered a check to undue freedom of actions. But in her presence he would forget himself and be diverted. He had so far sobered, when he knocked at her door, as to appear in much of his usual manner; though his eyes were bloodshot and somewhat leering still, with the rank, repulsive odor of liquor clinging like an atmosphere to his presence.

Stella met him with her usual intense reception, and permitted him to kiss her lips. She did not shrink from his unlicensed advances. She looked upon his haggard face, and constrained manner, and unkempt appearance, and bleared eyes, unreproachfully. She was ready to excuse them all; for her yielding spirit and indulgent acts would prove her love, she thought. It did not seem to dawn upon her clouded mind that disrespect, instead of love, would be fostered; that even the lowest of men admire and honor

womanly purity and self-respect; that only the grosser nature is indulged in their absence, which leads irrevocably to contempt, hatred, and blighting sorrow. She would blindly sacrifice herself for his unworthy love, and suffer cruel spurning as a reward. How many shipwrecked lives—once lovely lives; how many unmarked graves and broken hearts that have been left behind; how many low, shameless, shrinking, haggard faces that shun the light of day,—attest the truth that self-immolation for man's love is a delusion! Veneration for womanly purity of heart and actions rises as certainly from the pollution of degradation as from the sheltering love of irreproachable manhood. Stella did not think that to gain a man's true love was first to gain his respect. The process follows moral laws as certainly as our little globe the laws of physical nature. Janie would have said: "Spurn the man that would dare trespass upon true womanly delicacy and gentle refinement. No love without chivalric loyalty to woman's gentle nature as a protector, rather than an invader."

It is not our purpose to look upon them in their evening's association; but rather to witness the final conclusions reached in moral weakness to-night, that will shape and shadow their future to the grave. As this night had already solved the life-question between Janie and Ludlow, so it was destined to conclude that between Stella and Ludlow. One was a happy, blessed escape; the other, a bondage that could have no release from misery and degradation. To both women had been given equal opportunities of looking upon the man; and his character was equally clear to both. But their views and motives were diametrically opposed. Char-

acter, in one case, decided the issue—facial beauty, Apollo-like proportions, and a smooth tongue decided the other in the face of moral weakness.

As the night waned, Charley said to Stella:

“I have, at last, given up all thought of Janie Allen. I am satisfied to think of her as dead hereafter.”

Stella's look assured him that she approved his words.

“She is dead to me, also,” she answered. “We broke friendship long ago, and do not recognize each other now. She is too whimsical patiently to endure, and too bitter against you to suffer longer. She ought to be nothing to either of us;” and then with a look that craved approval, she added, eagerly: “I can not be a friend to those who are unfriendly to you.”

In a selfish way he but half-heartedly replied:

“Thank you, Stella,” and then, with an intently gloomy look, added: “I have no friends on earth to-night.”

“And, pray, what am I? Do you count me nothing?” replied Stella, quickly and desperately.

“Forgive me, Stella. I do n't mean you. My words did not apply to you. Please do not hold me accountable to-night for what I say. You are all that is left to me. You will not desert me, and cast me off; will you, Stella?”

“Never!” she said, impetuously.

“And you will share my life and its chances with me?” he eagerly asked, as if just awaking to a sense of dependence upon her.

“Yes.”

“And lovingly draw me back from the despair which is closing about me?”

"Yes," she answered; "I will shield you from trouble, and my love will lift you up again to the proud place you once maintained among your friends. I will exert a woman's power!" she said, with proud confidence.

He looked at her steadily, as if weighing in his mind the remnant that was left of his former manhood; and wondered if woman's power could change his desires and passions that had now bound him with iron-like fetters.

O, how many young women have relied upon love and woman's powers for the reformation of men, only to awake, at last, to a thralldom worse than death—an agonizing disappointment that has made the grave a welcome refuge! It is an awful delusion to which to awake at last in sorrow.

But Stella lacked the pure moral impulses that had ever characterized Janie's motives—the only real safeguards that stand between women and degradation. Stella felt in this moment an exultant feeling, that she had at last gained the object for which she had intrigued, and that it was a triumph over her old friend.

When Charley was about to leave her, late in the night, she asked if he would not see her on the morrow.

"No," was his reply, "I must be in the city early in the morning."

"And do you not see your mother again before you go?"

"No," he said; "she does not know that I am here, and will be none the wiser if I do not go to her to-night."

A shadow of unspeakable disappointment crossed Stella's burdened heart at thought of the heartlessness embodied in the reply; for she knew of the lonely, heart-broken mother's clinging sorrow for the absent son.

"And why so urgent a call to the city?" she asked sadly.

"Because, I must not be seen here now," he replied, with a look of self-reproach.

A still deeper shadow crossed her heart like a torturing pang, in the appalling conviction that rose like a horrid specter before her that he dared not, because of the evil he had done. "And after all, the sense of possession of the loved one now does not preclude the shadow of suspicion that all is not well from creeping into my heart," she thought, with sickening, tantalizing misgivings. She stood before him, sobered and humbled.

"Will you not, to-night, Charley, tell me your business? You know that now I have a right to it. I have never intruded upon your affairs before, but have trusted you, and believed that all was right, though you have ever maintained an unbroken silence. What are you doing, dear?" she asked, pleadingly.

He faltered, and stammered, and then would have harshly denied her; but a falling tear from her overburdened eyelids appealed to his deadened sympathy, and he said:

"My business is in the pool-rooms—and—other things I can not well explain. You will know more of them in the future."

Stella did not understand the significance of his words, but he had replied to her question, and that was enough. She was satisfied, though pained by emotions she had never before realized.



CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

THE chill and somber fall had crept slowly into mid-winter, and nature had assumed another phase of beauty. It was the white, crisp snow that now enveloped nature, as young womanly purity beautifies the human exterior. Softly the crystal flakes had fallen one by one, and deepened its mantle until spreading a foot in depth over all the far-reaching landscape. Trees were laden, and their outstretching branches bent beneath their glittering burdens, and the leafless stocks of protruding weeds stood with heads bent to the white sea beneath. Not a bare furrow or stubble-covered field but was hid beneath the mantle of spotless white. To Janie, all was matchless beauty; and it prefigured her own spotless purity of character. As the spring's warm and resurrecting touch seemed to exalt her, so, in the presence of the silent, reposeful purity of snow-covered winter, her heart felt a gratifying sense of nearness to the great, untainted, and spotless heart of the God of all. From her windows she strove to catch, in imitative colors, the winter shadows that lay in tints of

umber and crimson among the fields' uneven surfaces, lingering here and there as a parting legacy from the sun's declining face sinking beneath a crimson horizon. Her beautiful water-colors were faint pictures, in dull colors, of a living beauty that only the sensitive heart can feel, attuned to a love for the Hand that has so prodigally scattered them.

As she vainly strove to catch these living, divinely-touched beauties about her, her heart felt that the painter's true artistic inspiration must shine onto the canvas through a love for the God who ever bewilders by effects he impotently strives to imitate. The canvas could be but masses of dull color without the luminous beauty of divinely-touched nature lighting up the colors. And what is nature without this divine beauty looking through it? An incomprehensible jumble of chance-work, from which the human reason revolts. "What is nature but the expression of the Divine Mind?" Janie always thought as she lovingly contemplated it. "It is a vast, living, moving, complex system, exalted by thought, and following a destiny fixed by a Great Will that can have no part in chance," she reasoned. Through the avenues of music and painting and her love of nature, exalted by God's presence, her heart was lifted to a plane of happiness altogether above and beyond the reach of sin. To her the artistic sense could not be material; it could not be a chance grouping of atoms, but had its birth where divine laws had emanated. Janie, in her reverential reasoning, could not think as Stella, or follow like impulses. They were not equally moved by moral influences; their possession beautified one life, their absence dragged the other into the mire of sin and the hopelessness of despair.

Social pleasures are cultivated in winter. The cheerful fireside and its comforting warmth are attractive. Homes, upon the hilltops and in the valley of the great city, were aglow now with light, cheerful with music, fragrant with flowers, and beautiful with social entertainment, though the frigid winter without repelled with its shivering chill. Upon a cold, crisp night, muffled in its mantle of snow, a select company were gathered within the hospitable mansion of one of Cincinnati's wealthiest and most refined people. Janie was of the company. The entertainment was purely social, in which an hour or more at the laden table, and lovely music, and the conversational, engrossed the night.

Janie here met, for the first time, Professor Luther Wentworth, a gentleman of whom she had often heard. He was her escort to the table. He was a young man of fine presence, with a pale, studious, thoughtful cast of countenance. It was such a face as attracts the gaze in a vain effort to analyze the features in explanation of its attractiveness. It was indescribably interesting where the rugged, manly forces of nature stood out most prominently. It was a perplexing face, beautified by a refined intellectuality that seemed to illuminate it, and soften its rugged outlines into tender tracings. An explanation of only such general outlines as a first glance can give will be attempted. The expression beautifying the face can not be described. His forehead was high and broad, with heavy eyebrows arched above soft-brown eyes, set well back between prominent cheek-bones and sensitive nostrils, and a refined mouth above a firm chin. These are only the salient outlines of a face upon which the fasci-

nating play of human emotions dwelt, flashing from the depths of a gentle and emotional nature and a keenly-cultivated intellect.

The two had grown in intimacy as the hour passed, and it did not seem unnatural for him to say to Janie towards its close: "I deeply regret not to have met you before to-night; for it is my last night of pleasure before a long and possibly dangerous journey, upon which I start on the day after the morrow."

Then, to her inquiry, he stated that he had a roving commission from the Government, which would take him to unfrequented parts of the world; that he would first go to the Delta of the Lena, then among the Ural Mountains, and thence to the steppes and deserts of Turkistan.

"And alone?" Janie asked, with a questioning look.

"Yes, alone!"

"But do you not dread to venture among the dangers and half-savage people you will meet?" she asked, with an anxious expression.

"That thought I have never entertained," he replied, reflectively, as if awaking to it now for the first time.

"But still, it seems marvelous that you should venture alone," she answered as in sympathy.

For a moment he halted before the thought he would express; then in a gentle voice he said:

"While I go alone, Miss Allen, it is only so far as human companionship is concerned. I have always company in the presence of Him who has said: 'I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee.'"

A beautiful smile broke upon Janie's face like a rift of sunlight through clouds. Her lip quivered at the allusion which had suddenly touched her own tender love for the God of her cherished nature. She saw in the manner of the friend before her that no affectation was hid beneath his words.

"I am satisfied," she gently answered, a look of trustfulness lingering in her gaze.

Then he continued:

"My object is the flora, especially of those parts of the world. I am eager to know what beautiful species are thus hid from our knowledge. It may be that I will find some new beauty of the Creator's work. For that I do not count toil and danger by the way," he said, with that inexpressible beauty of features before alluded to.

Janie's gaze lingered upon the play of his mobile features as if to fathom the clear depths of a heart that could be so reflected upon the human face. "It is true," she thought in the moment, "the face is an open portraiture of the soul, beautified by moral purity, or impressed by every grade of sin, down to the dregs of degradation."

Janie read the human face by intuition, and it became an evidence that satisfied her reason, proving the presence and truth of moral forces in life mingling in human destiny. It was, to her, a consistent chain of reasoning, that was altogether more convincing than the metaphysical; for it had the satisfaction of demonstrable truth lifted above the realm of conjecture.

In the perfect confidence which such thoughts inspired

in the presence of his pure face, she felt strangely at ease with him; and with the feeling came also a deep concern over the imagined dangers she thought awaited him beyond the bounds of refined civilization, and she said, with a shade of anxiety still resting on her face:

"But it would be so much better if you could have a kindred spirit as a companion in your dangers."

"Yes, a companion would be pleasant, I grant; especially when the lonely nights will leave me isolated from the world. But the task is such that two can not well enter into it, and it is too attractive to give up for self-comfort," he answered, with forced resolution, and then added: "It will not, however, be for long!"

"How long?" Janie eagerly asked.

"Only about eight months. Should I meet with no obstructions from suspicious Russia, I will have completed my task by the next August. I may do so at an earlier date; for, with the official papers with which I am provided, I think no obstruction can arise."

Janie could not suppress the kind wish that gently knocked at the door of her lips for utterance, and she feelingly replied:

"You have my best wishes for the perfect success of your undertaking."

This was said in a natural and gentle way, that the professor instantly thought would have been offered spontaneously to any other one under like circumstances. But still it gave him especial pleasure.

He could not leave the subject without referring to the flowers he loved so dearly. In some strange way he

seemed to associate Janie's fair face with theirs. Then he asked :

"Are you not also fond of flowers, Miss Allen?"

"O yes!" she answered; "they constitute very much of my happiness in life."

"I was sure of it," he replied. "My friends call you a child of nature among themselves. What a beautiful name!" he said, looking earnestly into her blushing face.

"I did not know that the cognomen had reached your ears," she answered, blushing more deeply. "I suppose I do seem simple to my friends because I love nature. But I can't help it, Mr. Wentworth. It is a spontaneous feeling that seems to come with the light of day, and is not altogether because I have lived in the country. Even had I spent my days in the grime and soot of the smoky city, I know I would feel the same as now," Janie said, in extenuation of her peculiarity.

"But your love of nature needs no defense, Miss Allen. To me it is God's awaking of the human heart to his presence. The mystery of the tiniest flower is a living witness of Divinity. A nature that feels the great heart-throb of the Creator through the awful presence of his mysteries can be no rough organization," he answered impulsively, and with that indescribable play of emotions upon the face that made him beautiful.

"I thank you for your justification of what I have sometimes thought a weakness," she said. "My heart has been wounded, at times, when I have divined a touch of ridicule lurking behind the pleasantries of friends. But still I can not help it more than I can help seeing the presence of a Creator

in the beautiful mystery clothing everything upon which the eye lingers in life. Nature follows me here, and looks out of the speaking eyes of friends with as much force as from the matchless faces of my flowers arrayed in beautiful verdure."

"Your friends are not unjust to you, Miss Allen, nor are their words slightly uttered. They call you a child of nature because of the fitness of the title. I see its propriety myself, and the same thought may linger in my mind, too, in the silence of the desolate Lena, or the wastes of Asiatic deserts. I hope, sometime, to find a new flower, so delicate and beautiful that I may call it after your own name," he said, with an assurance of sincerity that pleased Janie; for his words did not appear as if tainted with flattery.

"Do you incline to any particular class of flowers?" he asked, as if to probe deeper into the secret of her love of nature. "It sometimes happens that we are pleased with certain species, and turn away from others, as we do to human differences of character," he said guardedly, in explanation of his question.

"Attraction and repulsion I may feel in human nature," Janie replied, feelingly; "for sin distinguishes these; but no taint of sin has rested upon innocent nature, as depicted upon the flower's face. Some glow with gaudy colors—others with modest tints; but they are all pure and beautiful alike, and lift their fair faces with equal boldness to the sunlight, and proclaim the Creative Mind with equal force. The simplest flower is as much a fathomless miracle as the grandest and most pretentious. Wild or cultivated are alike to me. The cornus, or ictodes, or corydalis, or sanguinaria, or their myriad sisterhood sheltered beneath the shades of the forest;

or the sambucus, or phytolacca, or datura, or eupatorium, in the lanes and fence-corners; or the vernonia or verbascum of the open fields, are of like interest with the violet, or tulip, or iris, or clustering labyrinth of beautiful upturned faces from cultivated beds or conservatories," she said, with an unchecked flow of language that startled her at its conclusion.

She had not intended to speak so freely, or give such license to her play of fancy. Her self-reproach heightened the color in her face, with the thought that she might be considered pedantic. Her pleasure turned to pain in the instant, and her sensitive nature was oppressed.

"O, forgive me!" she pleaded in the instant. "I know you will think me a child now, indeed; not a child of nature in the larger sense, but a child in very weakness. It was your question that led to my sudden freedom of expression," she said, with mortification written all over her sensitive face.

But the professor did not condemn. He was delighted by the new revelation of her character. He had been given a sudden glimpse behind the veil, that aroused to a sense of admiration he could not escape.

"Do not be unjust to yourself, Miss Allen," he urged, soothingly, and with an earnestness of manner that appeared in deepest soberness upon his face. "I thank you for a single glimpse of your character that you would have concealed. I am sure it will be a pleasant remembrance to me."

Janie looked quickly and searchingly into his face for a moment, as if startled; but the quick glance convinced her that his words were not unfeeling flattery.

We have not followed the play of conversation about the table to-night, for our interest has centered in the two lives who most intimately mingle in the present story. It is but the swift-flying events and salient features of a life that can be caught and fixed in a narrative, like the distinct features of a landscape on the canvas. The details must be lost of necessity. But, with the concluding words of the professor's lips and Janie's intent look, the company arose from the table and returned to the drawing-room.

There the rippling murmur of conversation lingered with charming freedom, until interrupted, after a while, by music and song. At last the hostess pleaded with Janie, who still lingered in interested conversation with the professor, for the contribution of her sweet voice to the pleasure of her friends. She yielded, as a sober look crept over her light glance, and took her place at the piano. The professor stood near her with an eager look, as if intently striving to analyze a delicate flower that was new to him. Her clear, sweetly-modulated voice had a plaintive thrill, that seemed to touch other hearts than her own. Her musical selections were all full of tender melody that harmonized with her face and manner and voice. At last, with tremulous voice, she sang, with a touching sweetness that the heart inspired, the sacred words,

“Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.”

With the plaintive refrain, intensest silence stole upon the lovely group, that seemed to penetrate the inner sanctuary of their lives and still their heart-beats. Janie felt the music as if it were her own heart-cry; and her intensely praiseful

sentiment poured over her cultivated vocal cords as from an instrument attuned by God's own hand.

In the hush that succeeded the music, Janie, in her own sweet way, sang "Auld Lang Syne." In this she was joined by every voice, while eager eyes clung to the professor, standing mute and motionless at Janie's side. It was a parting farewell to him that hid many an eye in tear-mist. Then she left the piano, and mingled with her friends as if to shake herself from the hushed silence of the room.

Janie remained with the hostess during the night. When the separation came, Professor Wentworth lingered at her side for a brief while; and as he was about to take her hand in, possibly, a last farewell, he seemed to hesitate over a thought that contended upon his lips for expression.

"To-morrow," he said, "I have an engagement at the Observatory on Mt. Lookout, in part preparation for my work abroad. I will not be far, then, from your home. May I have the pleasure of that little drive, and thus meet you once more at your own home?"

With charming freedom, Janie turned her surprised look upon him in its deep flush, and replied:

"It will give me unspeakable pleasure to see you there."

They separated with satisfied looks, and under a play of emotions that surged over their speaking countenances like phantoms of light.

The professor had been delayed at the Observatory, and instead of reaching the village at an early hour of the morning, as he had intended, it was near midday before he

did so. Then he appeared before the home in a beautiful cutter driven by a liveried servant, behind a pair of proud, prancing, dapple-brown horses, the effect of which was startling to the plain villagers.

The acquaintanceship of the night was renewed under more humble surroundings. It was a simple meal of which they partook in the privacy of the country home-circle, with the gentle presence of father and mother to impart a welcome cheer that the brilliant company and laden table of the night before could not give. There was an exquisite composure of manner and freedom of intimacy, that shut the world out and set the guest at ease in the presence and sincerity of their kindly natures. It was not a studied effort of entertainment, but a simple, undemonstrative hospitality, that warmed his heart and banished all thought of the cold chill of the winter-day from which he had but just emerged.

"The delta of the Lena has a melancholy association with the memory of DeLong and his hapless band of adventurers, and it was a sad ending of a voyage of discovery that I hope will have no repetition," said Mr. Allen, as the journey of the professor was referred to.

"I do not look for it, Mr. Allen," the professor replied, cheerfully. "I am of a very hopeful disposition, and have the most eager desire to explore those barren and wind-swept shores. My preparations for such a journey will not admit of the fate that fell to those devoted martyrs. Everything that experience can provide for human comfort will be mine. I will lack for nothing."

"O yes, a friend!" Janie impulsively replied. "I mean

a human friend," she added, with a touch of self-reproach, as she suddenly recalled his words of the evening before, and of which she did not think before speaking.

His eyes sought hers in silent questioning. His lips had no reply. She had made him think that his journey would be a lonely one in fact. The thought brought an oppressive feeling, and he strove to shake it off. Then his face brightened under a new impulse. He said:

"Our cold winter here will prepare me for the cold I expect to meet there; and I can scarcely imagine that the sleighing there will be better than here at this time. It is so delightful that I would be happy to have Miss Allen take a little ride over the hills in my cutter after the meal. What do you say, Miss Allen?" he asked, looking appealingly to each one of the little group before him.

Janie's questioning look into the faces of her parents was answered with approving smiles. As he tucked soft robes of fur about her, the father stood by looking at the restless, nervous horses, recognizing, with the eye of a *connoisseur*, their good qualities. As the professor took his place beside Janie, the father exclaimed:

"Be careful or your horses will leave you!"

What more he would have said was lost in their hurried plunge and swift flight. The stimulating effect of the cold air upon their eager spirits made them dash away in the exuberant life of their intense animalism. They were not vicious, and never had displayed a fractious spirit; but before the level road at the foot of the hill had been reached it became apparent that the drive had assumed a dangerous aspect.

The professor looked earnestly into Janie's calm face and spoke words to reassure her. Turning into the straight, level road leading northward, the horses seemed to have gained the mastery, and were dashing away, beyond control, in a frenzy of wild excitement. In a calm, collected way the professor encouraged both Janie and the struggling driver; and then discovering a smooth part of the highway, lined to the fences with snow-banks, he leaned quickly over and grasped one of the lines in his strong grip, and turned their heads until they dashed into the fence and were suddenly stopped. It was at the risk of serious injury to the horses; but what were they to the precious human life intrusted to his care?

Fortunately no damage had been done. Beyond a few scratches, the trembling animals had been uninjured. To kind words and gentle strokes of the hand they finally yielded, and became gentle again and passive.

Janie laughed at the little episode as if a pleasant event, and insisted upon a continuance of the ride. The professor gave way to her wishes, deeply admiring the brave spirit in her little body that had not betrayed a quiver of the voice or a tremor of the nerves. Then, as the horses dashed away again over the smooth and soft snow under perfect control, he asked with a look of pride.

"Did you not feel moved by fear in the mad flight of the horses, Miss Allen? I confess that I did."

"No, I did not," she smilingly replied. "I am seldom moved by physical dread; it is the emotions of the heart, the strange impulses of the inner life that overcome me at times. Such feelings I can not reach by my will," she added.

"It is strange! Women are an enigma! The most delicate are strongest of will many times; while the physically endowed are often the weakest of spirit," he answered admiringly.

When, at last, they drove up to the modest home again, their hearts were moved by a thrill of purest happiness, a gift of the hour now past.

As Janie stepped from the sleigh she confronted the smiling face of Stella, who stood before her with outstretched hands.

"Why, Janie, how charming you look!" she exclaimed, as if nothing whatever had passed between them. "What a delightful ride you must have had!" she continued boldly, looking steadily into the professor's face.

A startled look of surprise and indignation crept over Janie's expressive face that sobered it in the realization of the deceitfulness of the greeting. She stood for a moment deeply embarrassed, and to break the unnatural silence that was disconcerting, she said:

"Miss Stella Bradley, Mr. Wentworth."

Stella held out her hand to the professor, her face wreathed in smiles, and with an eager look, said:

"We have not had the pleasure of your presence before in our village, I believe, Mr. Wentworth; it is quite an event;" and then turning to Janie, continued: "You pretty little rogue! You are always so successful in catching on to new friends! O you little sly puss! You should not give up old friends for new ones so readily. How many poor, broken hearts are scattered around, mangled and bleeding! Always a new victim! O, Mr. Wentworth, she is a lovely little co-

quette, I assure you! Your turn will come next, judging from present appearances," she said, with a ringing, hearty laugh, as if said with the meaningless freedom of innocent friendship.

Janie felt herself stunned and almost blinded by the cruel words that were uttered in deceit, and with the view of a false impression.

"How can I defend myself?" Janie agonized with herself, as the unnatural words fell like blows upon her dazed senses pitilessly.

Stella continued even more defiantly, and with a wilder abandonment of manner, and with a haste that could permit of no interruption, a witness to the utter discomfiture of the one and painful surprise of the other. Then she seemed to shrink, like a thing of evil, away from them, as she bid them good-bye. A few steps away she turned again, and with uplifted finger, cried:

"Beware, Mr. Wentworth, beware!" and laughed loudly and defiantly.

She felt that she had done her work skillfully, and had aroused a suspicion that Janie could not hope to allay. It was a strange satisfaction that had come to her heart in the thought. She had sunk to a still lower level of abandonment even since last we saw her.

Janie stood mute and horrified, without the power of explanation, and looked trustfully into her friend's face, to read there the effect of the cruel words to which both had silently listened. She saw him wearing a sober look that had never appeared upon his face before. She could not see into his troubled heart, there to read the deep emotions at work with

his happiness. They walked back in silence to the open door, where her mother awaited her; and after a little while, when the professor took his last leave of them, Janie's little hand rested in his grip, for a moment, that she realized did not have the clinging warmth to it that she had felt before. She said: "Good-bye, and God bless you with a safe return," and felt that, in a strange way, her heart was sorrowed, and that the present was a sad ending of a new pleasure.

We will not intrude upon the sadness of the story, as told to the mother in heart-breaking sobs. The wound was too deep to be healed by gentle words and tender caresses.





CHAPTER IX.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

IN the departing days of winter the moisture-laden atmosphere that hovers over Cincinnati is dense at times with the smoke and soot of its furnaces and myriad chimneys, and it is held over the basin like a suspended cloud of blackness, so that, from the hilltops, the great city is hid from view. It creeps like an offense into the beautiful valleys, and essays to reach the hilltops, but for the most part in vain. The palace-crowned heights lift their heads above the grime, and into the clear air, through every season.

Down in the darkness of the city, lights gleam with a yellowish glare from the deep recesses of stores and factories, and add additional pall to the gilded drinking-palaces of sin that, with wanton boldness, cluster upon her choicest thoroughfares. Their glittering fronts are decked in fantastic shapes of colored glass and carved wood; their doors swing beneath canopied arches on artistic metal hinges; and, from the exterior, are beautiful to look upon. Within, the mirror-lined walls, graceful counters, tempting decanters,



“Moral purity can not live amid such surroundings; evil only can thrive.” —Page 107.

music and paintings, beguile the senses, and divert from the degradation that can not be hid, until the finer sensibilities that suffer are at last benumbed and polluted. The atmosphere of the place is tainted, the talk is of low and degrading subjects, and the moral reproaches of the conscience are drowned in intoxicating liquors. Moral purity can not live amid such surroundings—evil only can thrive.

Charley Ludlow haunted one of these places like an evil genius. His shrinking face, that was turned from the gaze of old friends at home, was bold enough here; and his words were free and unrestrained. His coarse language, rough oaths, lewd jokes, and low manners mingled with the clouds of tobacco-smoke that oppressed the lungs. Not a thought of purity, not a noble aspiration of elevated manhood, not a love for fellow-men that would impel the heart to human rescue, not a Christian sentiment, could possibly emanate from such a place. Here Charley Ludlow had been schooled since breaking away from the quiet of his village home, and from the deceitful fascinations of the place had graduated at last as a proficient in the arts of gambling, horse-racing, and sins of a more appalling and degrading character. It was here that his self-respect had been destroyed, his love for pure womanhood had been tainted, his honor had become obliterated, and his youthful beauty of face and innocence of character had been effaced. Such doors swing upon noiseless hinges for the immolation of all that is best in human character, to those who are tempted to enter. The process may be slow, but is nevertheless sure. The taint may be inoculated with the first visit, and the first glass of wine, and the first yielding to the siren's voice. Charley Ludlow is not

an exception, yielding because of an unusually weak character. It is a sad fate that awaits the strongest in a dalliance with sin. It is a rule that the best wine is drunk first, the dregs last.

The career of Charley Ludlow is but a single witness of the great army plunging headlong to destruction. He is detained from the rushing throng only long enough for the gaze to rest upon the moral degeneracy that inevitably awaits every individual that ventures among the throng upon whatever pretext. He is not made to serve the play of moral fancy; but is a single example of the life-history of degrading influences upon human nature, inevitably. He but illustrates the force of moral law as certainly as that physical death follows the taking of poison. The danger of moral death, and the certainty of blighting sorrow, lurks in the life of every individual who lingers within the reach of such deceiving and fascinating influences.

It was upon such a day as we have described, when the pall of the smoky atmosphere hung blackest over the city, that Charley stood before the counter of his favorite resort, drinking with boon companions. The dark day seemed to have entered the dark recesses of their hearts, for their faces were careworn and haggard. Another friend entered and joined them—the same face that had been seen at the town-meeting. Slapping Charley on the back with heavy hand, he laughingly exclaimed:

“How are you, old fellow? You look glum!”

But Charley did not seem pleased with the salutation, and made no reply.

“Ha, ha! not yet recovered from the fright the little

girl gave you the other night, I see!" the friend continued; and all joined rudely in coarse laughter.

"Drop it!" replied Charley, reproachfully, and with a scowling look.

"A good joke! One on Charley! The gay Lothario that has upset the heads of half the giddy girls of the town dismal over a little country girl! Jilted for a fact!" and he roughly turned him round before the glare of light that shone full into his shrinking face. "See!" he said to his friends, "that pretty face could not make a verdant country lass love him. You are losing your hold, old boy!" he added, before the rude jibes of his friends.

"Better stop it," Charley interrupted, with a deeply sullen air.

"Yes; it does hurt, Charley, I know. But never mind, old boy. Come and have a drink. You will forget it all after a little," he said, soothingly. "I want to see you in the back room on business, directly."

There is always a vacant back room in such places, for the brewing of crime; and so, after a little, the two sat there alone with doors securely closed.

"It does n't matter to me what you do," said Charley, churlishly. "I always did want to protect the family, and you know I have refused to do anything against them; but whatever you do I suppose I will get the blame of it," he added, in deep dejection. "You know," he continued, "I can not be seen in the town again after my last little escapade. O, I was a fool to go there drunk! I might have known better! I can't even see my old mother now, unless I sneak in under cover of the night," he added.

"Never mind that," retorted his companion. "If you made a fool of yourself, it's no affair of mine."

"But it has shut the door against me, and I can not go there again," he replied, with a heavy heart and a sad, self-reproachful look.

"But that won't hurt you. No one else is to blame. I warned you against it, but you wouldn't take my advice," the friend retorted, unfeelingly.

"And yet I might as well be dead as be shut out from that spot. My old mother is there, and my affianced, and my old loves that I clung to as a boy, and still cling to," he said, with a pang of remorse that writhed upon his unhappy face. His conscience was hurting him this dark day, and the company of his friends and drink could not deaden it.

"O, bother upon such sentiments!" said his friend, with aggressive aversion. "We have nothing to do with such things now. When were you engaged to be married, I'd like to know?" he asked, in a deeply-censorious way.

"We will not talk about that."

"Just as you please," replied his companion, with contempt. "Will you talk about business, then?"

"Yes."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," replied Ludlow, doggedly.

"Nothing? And what do you expect me to do?" was asked, fiercely.

"Just what you please. Once for all, I say I will have no part in your undertaking."

"Frightened off; grown a coward at last!" exclaimed the friend, tauntingly.

"I am not a coward. I fling the epithet back in your face, and dare you to the proof," answered Ludlow, with trembling voice and defiant looks, standing rigid before his friend. "You know better than to venture such a taunt. The word comes with bad grace from your lips," he concluded.

After a moment's reflection, the friend replied, in a suppressed tone of voice:

"But if I release you from this expedition, the next thing, if trouble comes, you will peach upon us. Is that what you are planning to do do?"

"Do n't taunt me with being a traitor also," answered Ludlow, in intensest bitterness. "Have I not followed you like a dog heretofore; yes, and even led you on?"

"But we will now act upon the principle that there is no honor among thieves," coolly retorted the companion. "I do n't propose to leave you behind, and take the risk of an enemy in the rear. The way must be clear. You are bound to your friends by past acts that you can not escape. If we suffer, you will suffer with us. Remember that!"

Ludlow was sobered by the open reproach of thief. He stood hesitating under the cowering weakness of dread and fear of punishment the word had exercised. It was his conscience now that was suddenly plying the stinging lash. He assumed a conciliatory manner in the moment, and was willing to beg of his reckless friend.

"I will not betray you, whatever happens," he pleaded. "I can not go on this expedition," he said, and he seemed to shrink from an imaginary danger now threatening him. "Go yourself; the blame will all be mine, whoever does the work. I feel that it will be the ruin of me anyway."

His friend looked steadily at him for a time, as if undecided whether to force him by his criminal mastery over him. It was a power he had used upon other occasions. But now, he recognized that his dread of the work was so great, that he would possibly be an obstacle, and concluded at last to release him.

"Will you swear, Charley Ludlow," he asked, "if we release you from this undertaking, that you will be true to us, even if you are suspected? Do you swear it?"

"Yes, I will give you my solemn oath," Ludlow replied, with a visible sense of relief.

When at last they entered the brilliantly-lighted saloon again, it was to mingle with the degrading associations called by them good-fellowship, in which continued drinking and low language blended like foul emanations from perdition. Whatever the garb by which they were clothed, or whether the air of wealth or poverty clung to them, there was a common brotherhood of degradation that made them all akin.

Snow had disappeared from the face of nature now, and a late February freeze had locked the earth in impenetrable hardness. It was a night in which only the glimmering stars could be seen looking down from their dark, moonless vault above. They spread a silent, speechless beauty over nature in the dim light that scarcely broke the darkness brooding over the sleeping village. The heavens seemed full of stars, and the great, broad Milky Way stretched like a misty arch spanning the sky; and the constellations stood boldly out upon the vault, beautified by the clustering Pleiades and the brilliant planets. It was a lovely night, so

still and quiet and soul-inspiring. Crime would seem a profanation of its still beauty; and yet, in the presence of the speechless quietude of revolving worlds gleaming like jewels upon the bosom of space, agonizing groans, pitiful sobs of the heart-broken, fierce curses of brawling men, the stealthy tread of the assassin, and the lurid flames of the incendiary's work besieged the heavens, and assailed the still purity of the night-air from our poor, sin-cursed earth.

This lovely night was selected for another invasion of the inoffensive little village. The aggressive work had been planned as a retaliation for the citizens' meeting of self-defense in the early fall. A cruel, vindictive spirit moved the perpetrators now, who had first begun their work in a tantalizing effort. After a telling blow, they intended leaving the place forever, recognizing that, through Charley Ludlow, who was now unquestionably suspected, they might be brought to justice. It was to be the last night of their evil work.

At midnight deep silence locked the village in its close embrace. The guardians, whom the citizens had appointed months before, had grown weary of their vigil, and had retired to peaceful sleep, assured that danger could not lurk in this quiet night more than in the months past. While their sleeping senses were being soothed by undisturbed dreams, we will follow the quick movements of the wicked assailants in briefest detail.

From the darkness they crept into the narrow back streets of the village, and thence to the principal store, where they vainly strove to break through the iron bars that caution and fear had placed before windows and doors. After

noise they feared would arouse the nervous people, in breaking loose the shutters from their fastenings, they desisted defeated and maddened by the barrier that prevented further attempts. They cursed the cowards for their defensive precautions, and assailed the home of a prominent citizen near by. Access was readily gained here; but a sick member of the family lay tossing in restless pain on a sleepless couch, and the noise of the stealthy work aroused him to a sense of danger. It was but the act of a moment to awake the family. In another moment the stillness of the night was broken by the sharp crack of a pistol shot from a window of the house. Another answered back from a neighboring home; then another, and another, and many more in quick succession from every point of the compass. It was the signal of danger agreed upon by the citizens.

Again the men were foiled, and hurried footsteps were heard upon the streets, and the village was fast growing into a ferment of excitement. They had failed in plunder; they would apply the torch in their mad retreat, leaving behind a parting curse in the flames of the destroying element. As the citizens gathered in bewildering perplexity about the store and home that had been assaulted, they plied the torch to the haymow of Mr. Allen's barn, and looked exultingly upon the crackling work of destruction well under way before they again fled into the darkness.

The light sprang with lurid glare into the night, and the flames leaped and whirled and soared in gathering fury that could not be assuaged. Mr. Allen succeeded in rescuing his helpless animals against their mad resistance, and then could do no more than impotently view the quick destruction

of his consuming property. Janie and her mother looked upon the wild riot of the flames, in trembling fear and sorrow. "At last, vengeance had fallen upon them too," they grieved to think; and with anguish more keen in the thought of the perpetrator than in sorrow for the loss of consuming property. It was vengeance from the hands of an old friend; and the poor mother, in her lonely seclusion and midnight anguish, was unconscious that her cherished son was at enmity with the people who cherished her. For the mother and son they sorrowed, until tears of pity chased down their pale and careworn faces.

Then they were diverted from their sorrow by the clatter of the swift feet of horses dashing through the ruddy glare of the unchecked flames, that soon were lost in the darkness of the road looking cityward. The faint crack of pistol-shots startled their ears from the hidden distance; and their nerves were affrighted by the dread that the darkness, perhaps, concealed tragic horrors worse than flames of fire.

The pursuers had approached the pursued near enough to catch the sound of their horses' feet dashing over the hard roadway. But they were beyond reach, and the pistol-shots were an impotent expression of defeat; the answering shots a taunting defiance of rage and disappointment. With the return of the pursuers in safety, the dread suspense passed from Janie and her mother; and in the light of the still crackling flames, the firm resolve was made by the citizens to mete out vengeance to the marauders, let the blow fall upon whom it might. Sentiment was to be forever buried in the consuming barn now; and the stern visage of the law must rise, instead, from its ashes.



CHAPTER X.

WEDDED.

WHILE the consuming barn and vain efforts at robbery were sending terror to the hearts of the inoffensive people of the village, Ludlow was sleeplessly pacing his room, or sat bowed before his table, with aching head buried on his arm, tortured with a longing effort to penetrate the future. He cried to himself with a lingering repetition, like the measured throbs of the clock: "What shall my future be? What shall my future be!" The refrain was heart-sobs that the smiting conscience exacted, and they knew no rest the livelong night. He could not protect the little friend of his youth from fright and danger to-night. He had guarded her from harm in the past, but could not now. The comrades, with whom he had consorted and whom he had set upon the hapless village, would wreck their spite upon the Allens, and could not be diverted from their purpose. In the refuge of his room he could but follow their footsteps in excited fancy, thinking the while, that whatever of evil was done, unrestrained by his presence, would fall upon his own hapless head.

The hounds of the law would be upon his track on the morrow; and then what? he strove to think. His wavering mind remorselessly rebuked him at times, in the vigils of the night, that he had remained in the city like a coward, when he should have been near to Janie and Stella and his mother, to shield them from harm. It could then have been no worse than now, with the pangs of a nameless dread to torture. Detection and arrest and exposure could not be worse than the long night of suspense, and the inevitable suspicion that would attach to him. His sins had found him out. He realized the shrinking, harrowing presence of the sentiment that "the thief doth think each bush an officer;" and before the break of day he was suspiciously watching the door, or trembling at the undefined noises of the night, in dread anticipation of arrest.

The heart of the abandoned criminal suffers the keenest agonies of life. Crime can not efface the dread of punishment. It drives the offender relentlessly from concealment to concealment like an avenging Nemesis; and, when overtaken, conscience plies the lash that gives no rest. The physical law of attraction and repulsion is not more exacting than the moral law resting upon sin. Punishment follows by either the laws of God or the laws of men; and both together many times torture the heart to the verge of despair. Moral laws are not man-made, and are beyond man, as gravitation is. They establish a power for good that points the human mind to a Lawmaker who exacts good rather than evil of humanity—to a Tribunal above the courts of nations. The will outside of nature has defined the harmony and contentment resting as a reward upon human lives in accord with such

requirements as clearly as the plan and purpose displayed in the operations of physical nature. Such reward or punishment implies a guiding will outside of human life, directing human destiny. If not a human will, it is but a reasonable conclusion that it should be divine. If happiness is obedience to moral law, it is obedience to that divine will, and not to dumb nature destitute of thought. How, then, can we escape the purpose of such laws, and the conviction that they are for the good of men, not only here, but hereafter? No law has been made for evil, but for the perfect harmony of physical and human destiny. Reason grasps firmly such conclusions, and exalts to an assurance that human destiny is not defined and limited by the few brief years measured by the span of life.

With the earliest dawn Ludlow hastened to the shelter of the saloon, bowed by fear and sorrow. Already had his companions reached its shelter. Their sullen faces were more than ever bestial in the carousal they had entered upon as an anodyne to their balked efforts, and the gravity of their danger of detection. Their brows were clouded, and features were distorted with passion and exposure from the vicissitudes of the night. Ludlow's face was not less haggard and unamiable. As they confronted each other at the moment of his entrance, it was with sullen and defiant looks of suspicion. He read at a glance the defeat of their plans; and recognized in the instant the danger his thoughts had pictured in his lonely night vigil. They looked into each other's eyes for a time with steady aggressiveness. Had success attended their efforts, Ludlow would have been excused; but now he was a menace to their personal safety

in directing the law to them. It was their time now to desert him. The aggressiveness of the leader, as they stood facing each other, was expressed at length in the single word, "Coward!" which he hurled into Ludlow's face with a hiss of contempt.

Ludlow accepted the reproachful insult with a helpless submission, cowed by the ugly spirit and danger that threatened him. The vile word sank into his heart with the heavy, deadening self-reproach of his own conscience-stricken thoughts of the night. The gravity of his position in the loss of comradeship and the punishment that the moment presented, chilled him and paralyzed speech.

"Who would shelter him now when his sins were about to overtake him?" thought Ludlow. "The friends, and places where evil works had been hatched, would rend him or close their doors in his face." Painfully his hurried thoughts chased through his distressed mind in the sound of the cruel word, "Coward," which still rang in his ears. He stood mute before his friends, but cast a pitiful, pleading look to their estranged faces.

"I am not a coward," he answered, with perfect self-effacement, and an absence of asperity of feeling that arrested their bitter antagonism in the moment. The three turned their bloated, haggard, and soiled faces upon him with questioning looks, and then their lips curled in contemptuous derision of his abject humility.

"Take a drink with me, boys," said Ludlow. "My mouth is parched, and I can not talk. Don't forget the past because of one failure. My lot is worse than yours," he pleaded.

To the abandoned the intoxicant is the panacea that heals all wounds and bridges over all difficulties. They drank together—once, twice, thrice, at Ludlow's expense. Then the tone of voice softened; the eye forgot its reproaches; their hands clasped in fellowship, and the old feeling of comradeship returned.

"Let us go to the back room," said Ludlow, when all this had been accomplished. "There are no ears there but our own."

The work of the night was narrated, larded over with vile oaths. Ludlow was not visibly affected until the burning barn was mentioned. The details of this were given with savage delight in the presence of his sorrow and troubled face. He offered no reproaches, but sat as if transfixed by the weight of a settled gloom that was crushing the heart. How to escape the detective became at last the all-engrossing thought.

"It is not you who will be sought," gloomily said Ludlow. "It matters little whether you remain here or in hiding, for you can not be suspected. I am an exile from my home now, and a fugitive from justice—justice that I have not violated!" he said bitterly. "But it is all the same. I am suspected, and it will be upon my track that the hounds will be let loose. It is I who must flee—flee for the sake of others."

"Look here, Ludlow!" replied one, with bitter aggressiveness. "Do n't intimate that you are spotless innocence! Who opened the way for our raids upon the town? Who dictated the places for robbery? Whose spite was to be gratified?"

"Mine," answered Ludlow, humbled by his own self-reproaches.

"Who ought to suffer?"

"Only me," he said. "It is a just retribution that has grown out of my whisky-blunted depravity. I thought, once in life, to have done better—I ought to have done better," he added, with a haggard look that was pitiful in his despair.

The thought of Janie crossed his mind. The relentless conviction crushed his heart in lingering remorse that but for his preference for evil associates and drink he might now be in the restful possession of her love and association; that the present was a bitter ending to all hopes of young manhood; that he must be at last a fugitive from the justice his friends required at his hands. He was dumb before his self-reproaches and the heartless taunts of his friends. They cruelly laughed at him as they witnessed his silent mental conflict, that stood out in speaking lines upon his face.

"It is hard, old boy, ain't it? Should n't have been such a naughty boy! Should have stayed in of nights, and minded your mother!" one said, with heartless jibes and laughter.

Ludlow turned his crushed look toward his tormentors with a faint appearance of defiance. "Even my companions in sin have no pity," he cried to himself in his helplessness, and laboriously rose from his chair, and slowly staggered from the room, lost to every hope.

It was he that must be in hiding. He sought the refuge of his room, and here only for a brief while. In its uncertain seclusion he felt himself alone, without a friend in all

the world—and yet not alone—for mother and Stella came to his thoughts to remind him that two hearts, at least, had not fully deserted him. But the helplessness of their clinging confidence was a pitiful consolation when thus driven by a relentless fate beyond their presence. He must leave even them with the tantalizing desires of a correspondence denied, lest letters should reveal his hiding-place. The sting of remorse was still more painful in the conviction that his poor mother must be left to the cold charity of the world or the poor-house; an agonizing sorrow gnawing at her heart the while, because of his wickedness. He would write to both mother and Stella, came to his burdened thoughts; and then, with that pitiful farewell, he would seek oblivion in the wilds of New Mexico.

First he wrote to his mother. He told her that he was forced to take a hasty journey; that in time he hoped to return to her; that he had changed his ways of life for the better. He begged her not to be cast down, for he would send her remittances from the West. He implored her to be hopeful, and wait patiently his happy return; and then he wrote the word “farewell,” which cost him deep groans that sounded strangely upon the solitude of his room.

He was deeply thoughtful as he attempted to write to Stella. His mind wavered in conflicting tumult. What he would write at one moment he would destroy the next. After a labored effort, he at last concluded the following:

“DEAR STELLA,—At this moment I feel that we have never enjoyed the strange, sacred intimacy of betrothal. Is it to be denied us forever? At this moment I cling to you as the last hold upon life. If you have the power you once

promised to use for my good, now is the time to try its virtue. In a few days I will be a fugitive from mistaken persecution. It was not I who assaulted your village last night. Believe me, I had no part in it, but am suspected, and having no one on earth to prove my innocence, must flee for the crime of others. In God's name I tell you the truth. I can not go away into the uncertain future, without feeling that I have one tie binding me to the past, recalling me from exile at last. We are plighted. Will you make one great sacrifice for my sake? It may be asking much of you, but all depends upon your decision. I can not come to you; meet me, therefore, to-morrow at —— and be my wife before I go. Let me feel that my heart's desire is gratified in this. Farewell until the morrow."

Stella was thinking of Ludlow at the moment his heart had wrestled with the desire to make her his own. But her thoughts were not happy; or, altogether reproachful. From every lip she had heard the confident accusation expressed that it was he who had done the vile work of the night. In her mind only did doubt arise. She pitied him with the forgiving pity of trustful love; she was deaf to all accusations. She would have warned him of impending danger, but was ignorant of his place of resort in the city. Anxiety and sorrow clung to her succeeding night of sleeplessness, and on into the day when his welcome letter reached her. Her trembling hands could scarce hold the pages as she read. Hardly would she have time to meet him at the hour and place indicated in the letter. "He calls piteously, pleadingly—I can but follow my impulse blindly," she cried.

She loved him—had promised to be his wife. She had plotted for his hand; it was now extended towards her in

trouble; she would grasp it and cling to it for evermore. The brief time and concealment were obstacles she could surmount. He appealed to her promise of rescue. She could and would save him; duty demanded of her the sacrifice. So she reasoned in haste and excitement.

She was driven to the train, due in the hour, by her father's manservant. She had made a plausible excuse for visiting the city to her surprised mother, that satisfied her. Then she stood beside her lover, and together they sought the services of an obscure parson, and were married. He had secured the license, confidently expecting the present issue. Then they clung to each other in the strange feeling that now their lives were mysteriously bound together. With a few clinging words of love and promises that hope inspired, and they were torn apart, with the burden of an awful secret weighing upon Stella's heart. She had suddenly become a woman, with no more of girlish thoughts or lingering desires. The sunshine of life, that had begun to grow dim with unscrupulous plottings in the past, now seemed to be totally eclipsed in the presence of the burden that had come with the attainment of her desires. An obtruding sorrow came with the conviction that her marriage was not blithesome, like the happy realizations of her friends. The compact had been made when the taint of liquor was upon his breath, and the bond when the taint of crime was driving him from her. Was she happy in the awaking of such realizations? The leprosy of sin had come with its withering touch to blight her life. Increasing wretchedness awaited the passing days, in which she would gather the harvest from seeds sown in the past.



CHAPTER XI.

ON THE FRONTIER.

CHARLEY returned to his desolate room with a new hope and an added burden, and a strange consciousness that he now had something to live for. But one of his pals awaited him with the announcement that a detective was shadowing the saloon, which sent a shivering chill through his trembling nerves, and a despairing numbness to his excited sensibilities. He was pursued now by the law and his reproaching conscience. Darkness had come to the day and his life-hopes as well. He must plunge into the uncertainty of a dismal future alone, beyond the reach of consolations of wife, or even the taunts of sinful companions, which would have been a relief in his extremity. For a time he was lost in the tantalizing horrors of self-abasement. He could not escape the future; it seemed to offer no ray of hope, and he shrank from it. It was like severing the heart-strings to tear himself away from the only spot of earth to which he now clung, as he had never dreamed himself

capable of doing—his country home and its quiet, peaceful, sheltering surroundings, where an air of purity dwelt.

His thoughts were a torture to him. Of what good now his evil associates? They had turned against him in his hour of distress. Of what good his beguilements of the cup, which had seemed like boon companionship?—all a withering, blighting deception, alive with stings of disappointment. Of what good now the sympathy of country friends, which he had slighted in the assurance that he did not need it?—even that had turned to hate. And so he must turn his back upon associates, deceiving friendships, the sympathies of childhood, and, worse than all else now, the remnant of confidence still lingering in the hearts of wife and mother.

To escape the maddening reproaches of his thoughts and the lashings of conscience, he busied himself in packing his trunk. When the lid was closed, and the key turned in the lock, he tacked a card bearing another name than his own to the lid. His heart-pain tortured with keener anguish, in the realization that even his name must be left behind in the general wreck. He was worse than Esau who had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. The story of the Prodigal Son, feeding on husks of swine, had repeated itself in him; but with the despairing difference that none could forgive and save from the exactions of the law which he had defied.

Then he was at last upon the train. Not a hand had been extended in friendly farewell; not a kindly word, wishing him a safe journey and happy return. His eyes burned like fire, where the fount of tears had been dried by the

intense heat of despair and blight. A single tear would have been like a drop of water to the rich man's tongue in perdition from the tip of Lazarus's finger. The train sped on over weary miles of length, and more weary hours of duration, with the unspeakable oppression of utter loneliness crushing with its weight. He could not, dare not mingle with those about him. For the first time he felt himself unworthy of the contact of better natures, whose happy smiles he envied. He was fleeing, driven by the lash of remorse and a smiting conscience; pursued by a pack of growling, snapping wolves of evil acts that had started from the city upon his track as he began his flight. They would follow him to his journey's end, and drive him at last, he felt with a shudder, away from reform and hope. He seemed to feel himself lost beyond the reach of recovery, utterly discarded by the world.

At last his destination was reached. He was at rest now in the assurance that the law could not reach him. He walked from the train bewildered by the new world which seemed to open about him. Every trace of comfort or refinement had been left behind. Sin did not lurk behind gilded doors here, but stalked boldly upon the streets. The faces he met were bold and reckless and obtrusive; the houses were low and irregular, and of boards, like the sidewalks; the streets were of tenacious mud that seemed to have crept over the slippery walks, and up the sides of the houses, and, so far as he could see, into them. An appearance of poverty-stricken dilapidation clung to the very animals of the streets, as well as to the slouching forms of the people, and the broken windows of dirty shanties that were filled with a varied assortment of

makeshifts. Drinking-places assailed his eyes from every hand—low, degrading places, patronized by brazen loafers, who carried pistols openly in belts strapped about their waists.

Before reaching the hotel he was confronted by a reeling, whooping, cursing, and morally-abandoned wretch, who halted on his unsteady feet, and through blearing eyes looked upon him, first in amazement; and then, with insulting laughter and oaths cried, "A tender-foot! a tender-foot!" Ludlow learned better after a while the meaning and import of the word in the minds of the rough border outlaws. The hotel was a two-story frame structure, the entire front of which was given up to a low saloon, and through which the only entrance to the rooms above could be had. He was horrified in the presence of his sinful surroundings, of the open, defiant, reckless abandonment of the hellish degradation about him here. "He had escaped Scylla, only to be wrecked upon the merciless Charybdis," he thought. And yet the actual sin, here and there, was the same. The murderous spirit was incited alike by the liquor of both; manhood, in the association, would suffer equal effacement; hopeless abandonment and despair tortured the victims of sin alike in both places. The same death awaited the individual, with the single difference of secrecy and open publicity without restraint of law.

Ludlow had not reached the point of absolutely blunted sensibilities. He could suffer remorse as well as fear of punishment. He was still subject to the smittings of conscience. Can man ever reach the depths of degradation where this monitor ceases to impress? It is doubtful; for the immortal

spirit can not be quenched. Is it not this, where humanity sinks at last into the lowest depths, that leads to the destruction of life by the self-inflicting hand? Ludlow did feel keenly his change of position, and shrank from the defiant openness of the degradation about him. He would have sought better companions; but could not, because he had been cast adrift upon the wild waves of this turbulent populace by criminal acts that had made him an outlaw. Such were his natural associates.

Timidly he made his way through the loungers of the bar-room, and applied for lodgings. The rough curses that befouled the tainted atmosphere of the room, heavy with rank odors of liquor and smoke and foul breaths, were hushed long enough for the curious gaze to take the measure of the newcomer. It was a critical gaze, that was acute in its penetration of character, reading with quicker intuition than the cultivated eye the printed page. A long, steady, sullen gaze of the barkeeper answered his inquiry.

"You want a room?"

"Yes, if you please."

"A whole room to yourself?"

"Yes."

Then he looked Ludlow over again with a sneering scowl, that in its roughness was intimidating. "Do you think yourself better than the rest of us, that you can't double up with another?"

"O no!" quickly replied Ludlow; "if you have n't accommodations for me I can go elsewhere."

This was answered by uproarious laughter from several of the bystanders, who had closed around him.

"Where will you go, old boy?" asked one, derisively.

"Is this the only hotel in the town?" Ludlow asked, hesitatingly, as if realizing himself in a trap.

The landlord was still looking at him with calm indifference. Jerking his head towards one of the men he said:

"Tell this tenderfoot if there is another hotel in the town!"

"Yes," the man answered, "plenty of them; but you happened to strike the only decent one in the place. This one is Paradise, the others are—well—the other place," he said, with an insolent leer into Ludlow's unhappy face.

He could do no better. He would have to adapt himself to the new condition, and would begin now, making a virtue of necessity. While waiting for the further movements of the man behind the counter he hastily took a survey of his surroundings and of the crowd mistily defined in the tobacco-smoke that filled the room. It was not assuring. It was a rougher crowd than he had been used to; their ways were unlike anything he had encountered before. "Could he become one of them?" he asked himself in trembling doubt. But he was aroused from his reverie by the rough voice of the landlord.

"What is your name, tenderfoot?" he asked, abruptly.

"Charles Lud—I mean Bradley," he said, with a quick correction.

He had almost betrayed himself by his real name. His momentary embarrassment and correction were, in fact, a betrayal to the keen observation of his allocutor.

"Ah! an alias!" he said, with still more provoking calmness.

"Where do you hail from, tenderfoot?" he asked.

"Chicago."

"You do? I'll bet you lie, tenderfoot."

Ludlow's cheeks tingled with hot blood from the insult; but in this crowd he could not assert himself.

"How long do you stay?" was asked, insolently.

"I expect to remain a long time," he answered, in a hapless way.

"O, can't go back, I see! Well, make yourself at home," he said, turning to speak to others.

"Do you ever drink anything, stranger?" said one of the men at his elbow, "or is it against your principles?"

"Yes, come," Ludlow answered, mechanically; "what will you have, you and your friends?"

"Not particular," the loungeer replied, laughingly. Then, with a loud voice to the room, he said: "Come, boys, the tenderfoot wants to make your acquaintance. Take a drink with him."

In their midst, Ludlow found himself an object of banter, and rude jokes, and insolent questions, and defiant freedom of manner. He thrust his wounded sensibilities into the background, and resorted to his old freedom that had made him a boon companion of the saloons of the great city. He touched the undercurrent of emotions that are common to all under like circumstances, and soon became akin to the low crowd around in language and spirit and manners. To his surprise he found himself accepted as one of themselves, and rough hand-shaking came with the blending of affiliations.

"Can't wear your store-clothes here," said one, at last. "Shed 'em! shed 'em!"

More than ever Ludlow realized that the saloon was his natural retreat; that under its influences, whether in the city or frontier, the same passions and desires were aroused; that the simple difference of material surroundings made little change in enjoyment. The associations here offered to his depraved character the same allurements that he had broken away from but a few days back. He could find solace in drink and gambling; and though discarded by the world could still find comfort in its estrangement. He would do penance for his past by plunging deeper and more recklessly in the whirlpool that now beset him. He continued drinking with his new-found friends; and later on, in a maudlin state, tempted the chances of the gambling table; and was finally helped to his coarse and hard bed to sleep off his drunken stupor. He awakened late on the following day with aching head, and helpless sorrow in the discovery that much of his money had been lost the night before. In a dazed way he dressed himself. When he would have gone out into the cold air the discovery was made that his derby had been replaced by an old, dilapidated, soft hat, such as cow-boys wear. He could do no other than appear with it before his new-found friends. Though ashamed of it himself, he was hailed by the rowdies as if a laurel-wreath had been set upon his brow as an award for noble deeds. Then he was forced to treat the crowd for the compulsory humiliation.

He went out into the streets again, that he might survey his surroundings more deliberately. He found the town sunk in a depression of the Cordilleras, with bleak and black mountain masses rising about him. In the clear air his eyes lingered irresistibly, through riven clefts, upon softened

ranges painted upon the misty distance. An air of vagrancy clung to the town, as if it had no permanency, but would, like the people, migrate soon to other localities. The houses were dropped here and there without method, and straggled off, one and another, in a lonely way to the distant foot-hills. It was a mining town, beyond the reach of civilization and order. Dark-visaged Spaniards, stolid-faced Indians, gaunt and swaggering miners, reckless-looking cowboys, and scowling desperadoes loitered about the streets aimlessly, or hovered around the open saloons. A strange medley of degenerate humanity met Ludlow's gaze everywhere. And this was the life he had chosen for himself. He felt ill at ease in his good clothes, realizing that they were a badge of suspicion. It was his old hat that now spared him the insults of the day before. It was a sign to the curious that the transformation had begun. In a few days they knew it would be completed, and his identity would be lost in the rough exterior and rowdy ways of the motley crowd.

It is hardly profitable to follow Ludlow in his gradual transformation. It came about more quickly than the butterfly from the chrysalis state, and was a change to a lower stage of bestiality. Deeper depths of sin contended for the mastery; and in discarding his ways of refinement, which had in part been left him as a legacy from childhood innocence, his effacement became complete; and he partook of the character of the scowling desperadoes he had noticed on the first day of arrival with shuddering dread.

There is no level plain of sin. It is an ever-increasing down-grade, merging at last into a steepness that plunges the hapless victim, resistlessly, into eternity. Ludlow had

reached this steep down-grade, and the precipice lay just before him. Mother, Stella, his old friends, were all forgotten in the downward whirl. They were effaced from his degraded memory, and they wondered in deepest sorrow why he no longer remembered them in the guarded messages he had sent them through concealed avenues of the city. What could have happened to him? Mother and Stella wondered in agony as the long interval grew still longer, with an ominous dread of death brooding over their gloomy apprehensions.

At length, on a clear day, in spring's beautiful sunshine, the deadening thunder-clap broke upon Stella's dazed and wearied senses, as a telegraph-message announced that he had been shot; to hasten immediately to his side. She sank to the floor, lost to consciousness from the cruel blow that had bereft her of every lingering hope. She awaked to reason at last, and to the appalling duty of breaking the seal of secrecy to her parents and to the bereft and widowed mother—to deal the death-blow that would slowly kill. The message was immediate and importunate. Her tortured spirit cried in agony at the delays that must drag with snail-like sluggishness, the hours and days before she could be at his side. She was agonized with the dread duty that compelled her now to unlock her lips, and heap sorrow upon her loving and doting parents. The story of her false step she had lingeringly hoped to leave to some favorable circumstance for the future to soften. A great burden of sorrow was now rolling over them all, that appalled with its threatening magnitude, and promised to crush and destroy. Stella bemoaned her hapless state, and the false step

she had taken under the impulse of tainted love, purchased with deceit and unwomanly desires. Her whole life arose like repulsive ghosts to reproach her. But with all, her duty lay with her husband, dying, doubtless, in the distant West. She must fly to him. It could only be done over the agonized hearts of parents and their dead hopes. With trembling nerves and streaming eyes, she sought her mother's side, and placed the telegram in her hands, and sank at her feet.

The mother read it over and over again in breathless silence, struggling to grasp its import. "Why does Ludlow send such a message to you, Stella? Why should you be degraded by his thoughts?"

She stood above her daughter, trembling like the leaves before the deadly, blighting winds of bleak November. A light began to break upon her. The message fell from her shaking hands to the floor, that touched Stella and startled her with affright. "What claim has he upon you, Stella? Tell me! Do n't kill me with suspense!" she cried, in bitterness.

Stella turned her affrighted, tear-stained eyes upon her mother for a moment—only for a moment—and as she beheld her haggard face, hid her own again in the folds of her mother's dress, convulsed in sobs.

"Tell me the worst and doom my life to the grave," Mrs. Bradley said, in a choking voice. "You can not more than kill me! Speak! What have you done?" she hoarsely cried.

"We are married, mother. I must go to him," Stella answered, piteously. "O, forgive me! forgive me!" and she

clung to her mother's cold hand that seemed to shrink from her.

"Forgive you? Forgive you?" she repeated over and over again, as if pondering the word forgive to grasp its meaning. "Forgive a daughter that would degrade herself and parents? My heart is suddenly turned to stone," she repeated, in a strange, unnatural voice. "I do n't know how to forgive," she said; and then, turning a look of deepest scorn upon the shrinking form at her feet, started as if to spurn her with her foot.

"No, no! Not that!" she cried to herself, shrinking back. "I can not be so cruel!"

She was startled by the force of her own ungovernable bitterness; and was aroused, in the instant, by the softer maternal feeling that she had so strangely lost for the time. She looked down on the groveling attitude of her daughter as a wave of pity swept over her, and then the fountain of her dried-up tears burst like a torrent. She sank into a chair at Stella's side, and the two cried together as if the last ray of hope had sunk this side of the grave to both.

Words could not dispel the heart-agony that convulsed, tears could not wash away the sorrow, agonizing groans or complaints could not unloose the cords that had bound her daughter to the skeleton of sin and reproach. The reality of the specter stood before her; overshadowing every fond hope she had cherished for the daughter's life happiness. She attempted to rise, and would have speechlessly left her, but from the floor Stella clung to her dress.

"Do n't leave me, mother," she cried. "Say you forgive me, I implore you. I know—I know I ought to have con-

fided all to you long ago. I should never have taken the step. I ought to have known it would break your heart. Poor, poor mother!" she cried, struggling to rise to her knees. "O, you can not forgive! You can not forgive!" she moaned, as she sank again to the floor in a swoon.

In the presence of such agony the mother forgot herself, and lifted her gently to her throbbing breast. Stella's white face and relaxed form and deathlike eyes, that had turned in their sockets until only the whites could be seen, affrighted her. She screamed for help. The servant and Mr. Bradley both answered the startling summons. Slowly she crept back to life before them all, and, realizing at last that she was in her mother's embrace, feebly wound her arms about her neck, and clung to her as the drowning are said to do to the rescuer. Both would live or die together. Then she looked with dread, that was like a gathering storm-cloud, to her father's face. She could not repeat the story to him as she had done to the mother. It would kill her. She pleaded with her mother to take her to her room.

"Tell papa! I can not! He must know all! It can not be kept back. O, I will go away and hide myself from your presence! If you can not forgive me, I must die," she cried, in tones of despair.

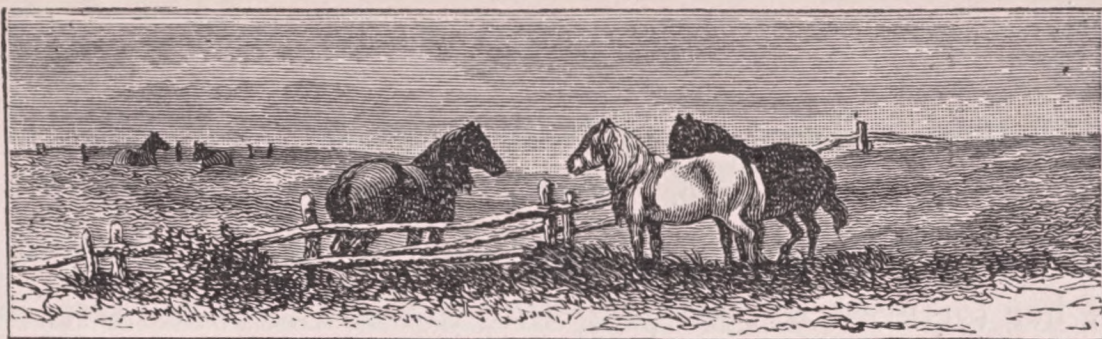
Dumbly the father looked upon his daughter, agonizing before him. In tender pity he lifted her in his strong arms, and carried her to her room, and laid her gently upon her bed, and besought her to tell him her trouble. But it was too great for utterance. She buried her face in her pillow, and could but cry. Then he left her alone, and standing pleadingly and patiently before the mother, his silent look

awaited her explanation. At last the story was told in broken sentences, and with a look of suffering that touched the heart of the stronger nature in pathetic sympathy.

It is well that all do not look upon trouble with the same vision, else consolation or sympathy would have no power to lift the bruised heart from despair. Mr. Bradley recognized the unspeakable affliction that had come to mother and daughter, and felt it a duty to save them. The disgrace that had entered their hitherto untarnished home could not be expelled. As a grim skeleton it had entered their closet, and must now be entertained. He assuaged the heart-pains of the mother first; then together they went to the bedside of Stella, and forgave her. Her poor, tortured heart went out in such a wild storm of thankfulness in the tear-stained reconciliation, that both parents felt it a trial from heaven to test their loyalty to their daughter.

Now they could review the past calmly. It was accepted as a necessity that Stella should respond to the appeal of the dying husband. She could go to him; but the father would go with her to aid and protect.





CHAPTER XII.

WIDOWED.

THE swiftly-hurrying train carried Stella and her father westward only too slowly. It was a sorrowful journey, that burdened the heart with dread apprehensions. One after another the great cities disappeared from view; then came rude, straggling towns; then treeless prairies; and finally the grim and bald mountain ranges that seemed to gradually surround them like an army of invasion. Civilization had strangely disappeared from off the earth, and its remembrance lingered as a dream. The narrow road-bed climbed higher, and wound about projecting cliffs, from whose dizzy heights they looked down into the silent valleys beneath, and on and on like a snaky coil, interminably. A measureless void lay between her little village home, crowning the graceful hilltop that lifted its crest above green fields and tempting pastures, and this bleak and wind-swept waste of towering rocks and black mountain ranges and forbidding gorges.

All these grim scenes seemed to weave themselves into

her suffering heart-thoughts like the web and woof of a dismal tapestry picture. Still on and on the narrow track crept into the strange and formless distance, like the hours of her tortured life creeping into the unknown and fateful future. At last the train sank gradually into a deep depression of the mountains, that seemed solemnly silent to Stella's tense and awe-swept senses. And there their journey ended beside a dingy, roughly-boarded room called the depot, without another house in sight. While wondering if some strange mistake had not been made, and fearing lest some cruel treachery had left them here to a sadder fate than they had already known, Stella looked with trembling despair at the departing train, losing itself behind a jutting spur of mountain masses, around which the track had curved. The blackest of shadows crept into her hapless life, as from the sunless crags that closely environed them; and she hung with dread suspense upon what the next hour would bring.

A strangely shy and rudely-mannered man stood in the open door of the depot, with hands thrust deeply into his pockets, and a vacant, obtrusive stare of the eyes, as if spell-bound in curious amazement.

"Is this the town of ——?" asked Mr. Bradley, hesitatingly, and with a feeling of thankfulness that he had come with Stella to protect her.

"Yes," answered the man, vacantly.

Both Stella and her father looked along the mountain sides, up the valley, even to the distant summits; but no houses welcomed their searching gaze.

"Where is the town?" asked Mr. Bradley, deeply perplexed.

"Over there," replied the automaton, with a jerk of the thumb over his shoulder.

"How will we reach the place?" again Mr. Bradley ventured to ask.

The man looked bewildered by the question, and then said with a little awaking of life:

"Walk."

"Walk?" ventured Stella, timidly. "Please tell us the way, good man. We will thank you very kindly."

This seemed to break the spell and arouse him. It must have been the presence of the woman that had dazed him till now, for his subsequent actions were quick enough. He probably had never before looked upon one so beautiful of face and form. He stepped forward with alert movement, and, taking the hand-satchel from Stella, started forward with long strides. Just beyond a little hill that had stood before them, they looked upon the straggling village of dilapidated houses scattered indiscriminately about the valley. Only in one spot, from their point of vantage, did the houses seem to cluster together with any form of compactness. This was the business center in name, but in fact the saloon and gambling center. Slowly they picked their steps along the rough highway leading to the village.

"Do you know Mr. Ludlow?" asked Stella of the man at length.

"No," he answered, turning a strangely quizzical look upon the two, after moments of thoughtfulness.

"Are you sure you do not know Mr. Ludlow? He came to your place within the last few months only. You surely know him!" she said, with a pleading look and a voice of pain.

"No," he persisted, shaking his head. "Do n't know anybody by that name."

Stella and her father exchanged troubled glances. They were now more perplexed than ever. The man seemed to divine that they were in distress; he said:

"A tenderfoot by the name of Bradley came here some time ago; but he was shot awhile back. He lays up there now in the hotel. In a pretty bad way, I guess," he added.

"Pray, take us to him!" Stella answered, with a choking voice and blanched features. "Please, be quick."

The man looked for a moment at her excited, trembling form, and then hurried his steps; but not so fast but Stella and her father kept pace.

A few steps farther on the guide stopped suddenly, as if from the impulse of an awakened thought.

"What might your name be?" he asked abruptly.

"Bradley," answered Stella.

"That was his name. Come to think he changed it lately, and calls himself Ludlow now. Maybe it will be something else after awhile."

"Please hasten and take us to his side," implored Stella, with trembling hand touching lightly the arm of her persecutor. "We must see him immediately. O I would fly to him!" she cried with blanched and appealing face that deeply touched even his rough nature.

Silently he started forward and strode faster. In a few moments more they stood at the open door of the saloon filled with a crowd of rough characters, from which she involuntarily shrunk. Their silent, respectful attitude and uncovered heads reassured her, and she stepped into their

midst, and walked through the stifling tobacco-smoke to the creaking stairs that led to the story above. Never afterward could she realize how this was done, or how she had found his room. But on the threshold she first saw the light of day looking through the gaping boards, and then felt the wind that, to her excited senses, seemed to scream through the open cracks; and there, on the hard couch before her, lay the silent and motionless form of a man—he, at last, whom she was seeking in sorrow.

She hastened to his side. His eyes were glazed, and the red hectic flush glowed upon his sunken cheeks like a flame. She grasped his hot hand, and bent over his speechless lips and kissed them back to life. His glazed eyes looked from their languid lids upon her face intently, and then a faint smile played about his face like sunlight, and his lips spoke, with an effort, the single word:

“Stella!”

“Yes, Charley, I am with you at last,” she cried, her hot tears bathing his face as she hung over him. “O, I will make you well!” she sobbed. “I will make you well, dear!”

The smile deepened as she spoke, and lingered about his face like a new-found joy. He faintly shook his head, and whispered:

“Too late! Too late!”

A strangely-beguiling disease is pyæmia. It is sometimes like a candle that has burned down to the last expiring wick. For moments the flame is dead, and darkness has succeeded; and then, with a new-found drop or two of oil, it flares up again, and burns brightly, with promise of continuance. So with Ludlow now. He had rallied from the touch of death

that had fixed his eyes in their sockets and paralyzed motion. He suddenly aroused before Stella's eager gaze, and life appeared to be renewed with energy. He reached out his hand, and grasped hers with a show of strength. Her heart was lifted in the moment. Her tears were dried, and smiles gleamed instead.

"I thought I would never see you again," he said, in weakness. "You have been true to me, dear. All the world besides have turned away from me;" and he struggled to lift her hand to his parched lips for the imprint of a kiss. "O how I have longed in pain to look once more upon your face! I gave up the hope to-day—awhile back—and thought myself dying. The sensation was like that of falling asleep. I was beginning to dream—to dream of you—when the dream turned to reality. I am so happy! I will get well now, Stella, and we will build a little cottage here on the mountain-side, and live good lives. O I will work so hard, and be honest," he said, looking tenderly into her face, "and work as never man worked to provide for you. You will save me then, as you once promised to do. Won't you, Stella?"

"Yes, yes, dear! I'll not leave you again," she said, stroking his hot forehead. "Only get well now, for my sake, dear."

"And mother," he said, tenderly, "we'll send for her, and we'll all be together again. We'll live, O so differently from the past then, dear. The mountains here are full of gold. I'll burrow through and through them for it, and heap all at your feet for your loving-kindness in finding me out."

He was growing excited. Stella stroked his hot hand, and begged him to rest.

"Your strength will grow, dear, with my nursing; and then we can say everything. Rest now for awhile, won't you, dear?" she pleaded.

"Yes, I will," he answered, eagerly, and lay for a moment looking intently into her face. It was a happy look, like that of childhood. Those memories had come in a glad train to his bedside to cheer the last expiring view of earthly things.

"I am so happy!" he said, with a sigh; and the lids of his eyes closed as if to shut out the world in restful sleep. But it was the flickering light of the candle that had burned up the few drops of oil that had fed the flame for a brief while. He faintly strove to smile again. Then a chill swept over his wasted form, that shook the bed and started great beads of sweat upon his face. The storm grew into a calm again; and then the lids lifted from his eyes that were steadily fixed on Stella's face, and lingered thus in the rigid stare of death. Stella clung to his cold hand, unconscious that his lips were sealed forever—that his heart beat no longer for her. She waited breathlessly, as she thought, for him to awake from sleep. But she was aroused at last by the touch of her father's hand on her head, as it rested there tremblingly.

"Come, Stella!" he said; "Charley sleeps his last sleep."

She turned a look of terror on the father.

"Dead?" she cried. "It can not be!" and she touched his forehead, his face, stroked his motionless hand, and kissed his irresponsive lips over and over again, and called

his name endearingly. She could not arouse him. She awaked at last to the blighting truth that he was dead.

Not a sound came up through the thin boards from the rough crowd of men below them. They all felt the solemn presence of sorrow and death. It was an awakening to many of thoughts that had long lain dormant in their abandoned natures. The presence of a loving woman brought back mothers, wives, and children they had left behind long ago. The latent spark of pity, love, and tenderness that had lingered somewhere in their sin-steeped and degraded hearts, unknown to themselves, seemed to have a strange renewing. They could not do enough for the stricken widow above them. They, too, suffered with her agonizing sorrow, and in many a rough way displayed the tender touches of pity that crime had entirely effaced until this awakening.

Sadly enough, the present was but an episode in their abandoned, sin-cursed lives. As the presence of sorrow would again pass from view, they would start once more on the down-grade, and with still swifter velocity.

The adjoining room to Charley's death-chamber had been kindly given over to Stella alone. With tireless devotion, they one and all strove with each other to watch over the clay that was precious to the bereaved widow. All noise was hushed, save for the faint clinking of glasses and decanters where the crowd drank in silence, or were in whispered converse, beneath the room of desolation.

One of the men, in his illiterate and oath-roughened way, narrated the incident that had led to the fatal tragedy. It was told to Mr. Bradley, as they walked alone in the early morning following the death, the white mist creeping up the

mountain-sides before them, and lingering like a screen before its rifts and ruggedness. There seemed to Mr. Bradley a solemn stillness of the air, that oppressed the heart and hearing, and deepened the effect of the story. It was a drunkard's gambling-brawl—a thing of common occurrence only, the narrator said.

“This dead man was too generous, and not quick enough with his gun. It was one of the worst men of the camp who had picked a quarrel with him. He fancied he had lost money unfairly. If he did,” said the man, earnestly, “it was only his own rule of cheating others that was played upon himself. He had no right to complain. We tried to warn your friend; but he was drunk, and could not understand. It was but a few words, and the gun was drawn, and then the bullet crashed into his side. We all knew he could not live, even if a doctor could be had. We then urged him to send word to his friends. It was from the telegraph message that we learned he had another name.”

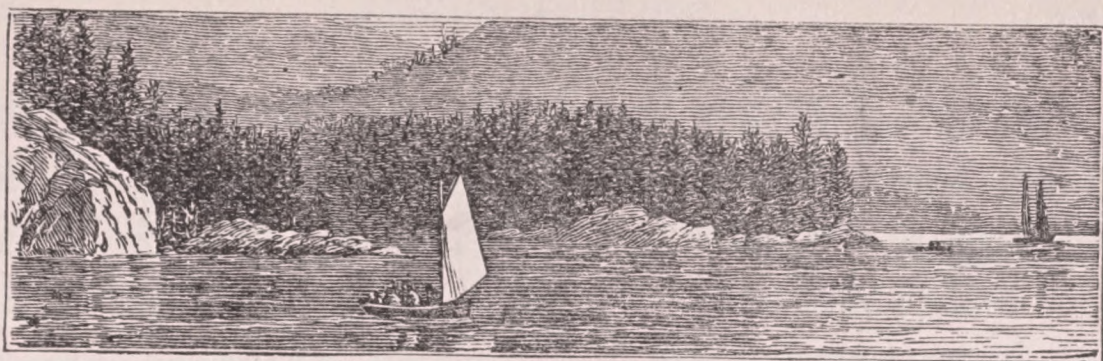
It was a plain, simple story, often repeated before in other camps among the wild hills of this secluded country. It was told in other language, and with more graphic effect; but the circumstances appear as well with one telling as another.

Stella could not consent that his poor body should find a nameless interment here, where all traces would soon be lost forever. He must be taken back to his old home cemetery, where a shaft could mark his resting-place, and be seen by those who yet clung to his memory. A hasty preparation was made; and with the shades of night creeping up the valley, a silent procession, composed of a rough, motley line of

men, slowly followed after the plain coffin and the weeping widow and sorrowing father, to the lonely depot. They looked upon the express-car, as the box was hid from view, and with uncovered heads remained a silent group until the train swept beyond their sight on the homeward flight.

The strange question here obtrudes—which were more blessed; the silent dead, or the living, stormed-tossed, degraded ones beyond the reach of hope, who now hastened back to their dens of sin?





CHAPTER XIII.

RECONCILIATION.

THE homeward journey was slow and wearisome. It gave time for retrospection and reflection; and with them came a sad train of self-accusations. Stella was returning to her home now, to meet her friends with a smirch of reproach on her character, and the struggle to live down the errors of a false step. The burden of her self-reproaches was largely on Janie's account, whose love for Charley she had supplanted, she thought, and by methods unwomanly as well as unkind. She had betrayed a pure and valued friendship for a treasure that had withered in her grasp. She could never again claim that friendship, and an aching void must remain to her life. She felt herself doubly bereaved.

The train reached Cincinnati during the night of Saturday. It was a soft, beautiful, sunlit morning that ushered in the Sabbath. Slowly the remains of the once cherished and happy boy were taken to the peaceful village home, to meet the interment that would set the seal of forgiveness and forgetfulness upon the lowly mound of earth, beneath which he was to sleep his last sleep.

The morning hour of service was given over to the obsequies; and, when the cortege drove solemnly before the church-gate, a shadow like a pall seemed to creep over the bystanders, and into the church, and over the hearts there of its crowded seats; and responsive sobs broke the oppressive silence everywhere. It was no ordinary burial; for a poor mother and a hapless widow, sinking beneath the weight of a sin-lost son and husband, were there in their presence; and pity wrung their hearts for the soul that had winged its flight to the great Judge of good and evil, out beyond the bounds of time. It was as with a feeling of awe that all were speechless; and the broken sobs but added to the solemnity of the scene.

Not a soul but reviewed the past, in the moments that the body of Charley Ludlow was borne to the church-door and within. He was a boy again to them; as of old, he was the impulsive, fair-faced pet of all; his quick, ardent nature grew before them into a restless, self-willed rebellion against restraints; then his change to the great city and his gradual transformation to shrinking avoidance of friends; and then, with dread suspicions confirmed, his final flight and death. It was a harrowing retrospection, that oppressed every parental heart now in the thought of their own sons growing into manhood, with the same temptations that had killed Charley stalking boldly before them. Would they pass through the ordeal, and reach manhood unscathed? And the thought appalled, in the presence of the sad ending of this promising life, now cold in an untimely death.

No sadder fate to boys than, at the very threshold of life, to step aside into the broad way that leads to death! This

was the burden that oppressed the aching hearts that were thinking and sorrowing over the sad fate that seemed to hover around the black coffin resting at the foot of the altar now. The preacher's words fell with measured emphasis on the deathlike silence, as they kindly recalled the good of the young man in early life. Then, in a general way, was reviewed the untainted and unalloyed happiness that comes to every good life; and a touching contrast was drawn between good and evil, concluding with Paul's solemn warning that "the sting of death is sin."

At the little cemetery, where the effect of the broad outlook over the peaceful valley lingered in impressive beauty about the speechless tombstones, the last leave-taking was made that consigned Ludlow to the worm and the dust. Now it was but the memory that lingered behind. Soon, even this would be extinguished, and the grim thought that a life dedicated to sin can not make a single friend on earth, or one to say that life was blessed, impresses with the conviction that sin is profitless. Good deeds live after us; and their blessings go on, like the silent waves, to unknown and distant ages. Better good than evil.

Now, in the lonely realization that all was ended, Stella felt the force of an ungovernable impulse to console the poor mother. It was the last and only obligation that could engage her lingering love for him. The old and decrepit woman was in a pitiably disconsolate state, distracted by her loneliness and poverty and sorrow. She, too, would have hid beneath the ground that seemed friendly to her in her longings; but the oblivion of death was denied her. She craved only to be alone, for none could console. With

the passing days she rocked, rocked, rocked, in her little chair more incessantly; she looked into vacancy more abstractedly; she muttered to herself more unintelligibly; she seemed to age more witheringly; and her features assumed a more settled haggardness. Her blasted and withered life clung more tenaciously to her wasted body. It was a lingering death she suffered, fed by the torments of gnawing despair. She permitted only Stella now to minister to her, as if she recognized in her a depth of sympathy she could see in no other face.

The day of supreme sorrow had passed with Charley's burial, and then Stella's mind was recalled to things about her. It was a speechless, grief-stricken life she awaked to, in which a settled aching seemed to linger about the heart, and wearied the brain, and that had no hope beyond the pain itself. The future seemed to her a measureless void—a burdensome contumely that could not be escaped; and her beautiful face was shadowed by a settled melancholy, where no smiles could play. A deep asperity of feeling induced her to think herself discarded by the villagers, attaching to her the odium that had clung to the husband, and left to her now as his legacy. It was a feeling of hopeless abandonment. The sentiment had burrowed deeper and deeper into her nature during the brief trials of her past few weeks, in which had occurred marriage, death, interment, widowhood, blighted hopes; and she now seemed to sink still deeper into despondency with the completion of each succeeding hour. It was a sad ending of young womanhood's eager hopes and desires, and through the operations of her own

indiscretion. This dreadful self-abasement was in its bitterest torment immediately after Charley's burial.

Then Janie's light step halted at her door, and her gentle knock seemed to reverberate through the silent halls. It was answered by Mrs. Bradley. She started as from an apparition, when she looked into her tender, pleading eyes. A ray of sunshine seemed to be reflected into Mrs. Bradley's face; for a faint smile swept over it, as, in a subdued and gentle way, she greeted Janie. She did not ask her to enter, but stood in a dumbly hesitating way, overcome with embarrassment.

Then Janie plaintively said, holding out her little hand in supplication to the mother:

"Can I not see Stella a moment? Please let me see her, just a moment!"

Mrs. Bradley still hesitated, and then silently but sadly shook her head.

"O I must see her! Do n't deny me! I must see her!" pleaded Janie, in deepest earnestness.

Falteringly, the mother answered that Stella had charged her not to admit any one now. "After a while," she urged.

"But now, Mrs. Bradley. Tell Stella that it is her old friend Janie that wants to see her a moment. I know she will make an exception of me. Please tell her," urged Janie, imploringly.

"O, I can not!" answered the mother, hopelessly.

Then tears came to Janie's eyes, defeated in her desires to console her old friend of happier days, and she turned sadly to retrace her steps.

"Give her my love, please, and tell her that I can not be happy if she does not see me."

There was so much of pathetic tenderness and sincerity in Janie's words, that Stella, from the head of the stairs, hearing them, relented; and, as Janie turned sadly away, she called her name.

Her drooping spirits revived in the instant, and she eagerly sprang forward, and in the next moment held Stella closely in her arms, and imprinted kiss after kiss on her fevered face. In speechless emotion Stella silently wept, her tears flowing like a flood unrestrainedly. A great throb of hope came to her deadening despair, and her heart beat fast in the presence of Janie's forgiving spirit. The mother left the two alone in the little drawing-room; for she could not remain a witness of the touching reunion.

There were grief and pity in Janie's eyes, as she looked into the pale and haggard face, as she held her stricken form in close embrace.

"Let me comfort you, Stella," she said. "You must not be cast down. There is a silver lining to the cloud, be assured."

Then Stella seemed to shake herself from the oppression and sobs that had mastered her, and with a plaintive cry, her head sinking onto Janie's shoulder, she moaned:

"Forgive me, Janie! O forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive, dear, nothing," Janie answered. "Our childhood love has come back to us. There is no estrangement."

Stella could not answer then, but in a few moments she looked into Janie's singular face of beauty, and kissed her

lips, as she had loved to do but a brief while back, when in the sunshine of an uninterrupted affection.

"O yes," she said, "there is much to forgive—more than mortal can efface from the heart."

"But, Stella, it is my heart that speaks, not the lips," Janie urged, laughing lightly through her tears.

"Yes, yes! Your forgiving ways I have known in the past; but my sins are beyond forgiveness. My self-reproaches are now the rock upon which my unhappy life promises to wreck itself. I can atone for everything else but my deceitfulness with you. O, that was cruel and wicked, and my heart is now tortured beyond—"

But Janie would not permit the pitiful self-reproaches to go on. She broke in upon the tempest of sorrow by putting her little hand over her mouth.

"Stop! Stop! Stella!" she cried. "I came to comfort you, not to set aflame the fire of remorse. That will hurt us both. Not a vestige of reproach remains in my heart. I suffer and agonize with you in your sore affliction. I am here to claim your friendship as of old, and in return to be to you a sister in helpfulness and affection. There is nothing between us but love—only love. Do you understand me, Stella? Only love!" and she repeated the word over and over again, that she might blot out every other word and thought by its repetition.

Stella's clinging look and embrace held closer to Janie. She began to realize that Janie's words were not a meaningless balm, but the true ointment that alone could heal the wounded heart. She had longed for this love in all her self-reproaches; and now, here it was in its original purity and

ardency. She could not be mistaken, for Janie had ever been true to her pretensions. She had no guile, nor envy, nor hatred, nor malice, she knew. She believed, in the moment, that nothing of the past would ever be recalled—that her heart was swept clean of every taint of reproach. Only the lovely and harmonious remained to beautify. While thus swiftly reasoning as to Janie, the dread of her own self remained to hurt her, and under its impulse she exclaimed aloud:

“O, I can not forget! I can not forgive myself!”

Janie writhed under the pain of that self-torture, which gave Stella's face a look of despair that seemed hopelessly discouraging. She would blot out the memory of the past few months from Stella's mind, but that was beyond her power. It would linger on, however much her own words and acts would wrestle with the present. Memory would join with conscience to apply the lash of remorse. In the delicate and mysterious human organism, there is that within itself to punish by constant racking pains of self-condemnation. Janie felt this deeply in her sensitive heart and overburdened desire to help Stella. It was with a plaintive cry, like the voice of pain, that she said:

“You have no occasion to call up the past now, Stella. That is buried,” she moaned, looking tenderly into her face, and clinging tightly to her hand. “We are to live again in our old friendship, Stella. That had no bitterness, you know. It was bright with the loveliness of nature in its soft winds and flowers and the music of birds. It was an untainted pleasure that we enjoyed through all our senses, and with the added joy of friendship. It can be no less now, Stella. Your young life must not be crushed out by the dismal sorrow

which has come upon you. I shall cling to you to lift you up, if only you will let me, Stella. You must; you must banish self-reproaches; for they are vain," and she drew her still closer to her with a soothing touch and manner that did much to break through the gloom, and through the rift, to let in a few rays of struggling sunlight of cheerfulness.

Turning her relenting look upon Janie's intently earnest face, Stella said, with words of touching sweetness to Janie's ears:

"The loss of your friendship has been more oppressive to my burdened heart than all else; for it was a friendship I betrayed, and could not hope to regain. It seemed, through all my dismal sufferings, to be the only anchor to which I could cling. I could do no other than reproach myself. I was ashamed to look into your pure face; for there I seemed to read even more bitter reproaches than from my own heart. To live in the same village, and feel your silent and just indifference, which I could but expect, would, I believe, have distracted me. I have been an alien, until your precious words ransomed me, to every hope and happiness on earth. O Janie, dear, I can not tell you with meaningless words the joy you have brought to my poor heart!" and hot tears flowed afresh from the eyes of both in the presence of the reconciliation that could not be doubted. They clung to each other with a renewal of love that, in its purity, angels could rejoice over."

Janie's mission was not fruitless, she felt, in the unspeakably affecting moments in which their arms were entwined about each other as of old. She was strangely happy. She had gained an entrance to her friend's heart that could never

again be closed against her. She would live with a singleness of purpose to ransom Stella's life. She said :

"You will promise me now, Stella, to love me just the same as of old. Remember, nothing has ever happened to cross our lives. We begin again just where we left off by the river in the beautiful springtime. No reference to the past will ever again mar our clear sunlight of joy and confidence," and she looked lingeringly into Stella's face for the assurance she craved.

"Yes, yes, Janie, just as of old, if you will promise not to think of the last time we met—when I was so cruelly unjust to you before Mr. Wentworth. That cruelty has been like a nightmare to me. You surely can not forgive that offense. O that was cruel, cruel ingratitude! I loathe myself for it. How could I have done so great a wrong!" she cried, as if in intensest suffering.

As that incident was recalled, Janie's face blanched, and she felt a trembling wave surge over her; but it was for only a moment, for then her strong will asserted itself, and she answered quickly in the presence of the storm that seemed to be gathering force again in Stella's words :

"No, no, Stella! All, all is past, never to be recalled. Do not bring up single acts now to intrude upon our happiness! There is nothing, nothing between us!" And Stella was overcome by Janie's impetuous manner.

Now and forever the door was to be closed and locked and barred against every specter of the past. The seal was not to be broken again. Stella felt this with the deepest assurance. Janie had indeed accomplished all that her gentle

heart had desired, and she, too, was happy—happier, possibly, than ever before.

Now they began to talk, as of old, in confidence, and in freedom. The past was recalled in sorrow, it is true, and with showers of tears; but they were like spring showers, softening the soil for the bursting forth of the dormant seeds that winter had paralyzed. Janie, in a pitiful way, listened to the brief letter that had called Stella to the altar, and heaped its burden of secrecy upon her. She read the telegram that had caused her flight to the distant West, and heard the story of the touching death that had made her a widow. The coils of sin and suffering had been wound about Stella's life so relentlessly that she was helpless before the state of bondage had been recognized.

The first coil, Janie knew, had started with Stella's forgetfulness of herself, and in the first permission of unnatural freedom on Charley's part. The succeeding coils were more easily and still more easily wound about her, her powers of resistance growing constantly weaker with each yielding to temptation. It was but the natural and insidious progress of sin and temptation, that blunts the moral powers and blinds the eyes with each succeeding advancement and yielding.

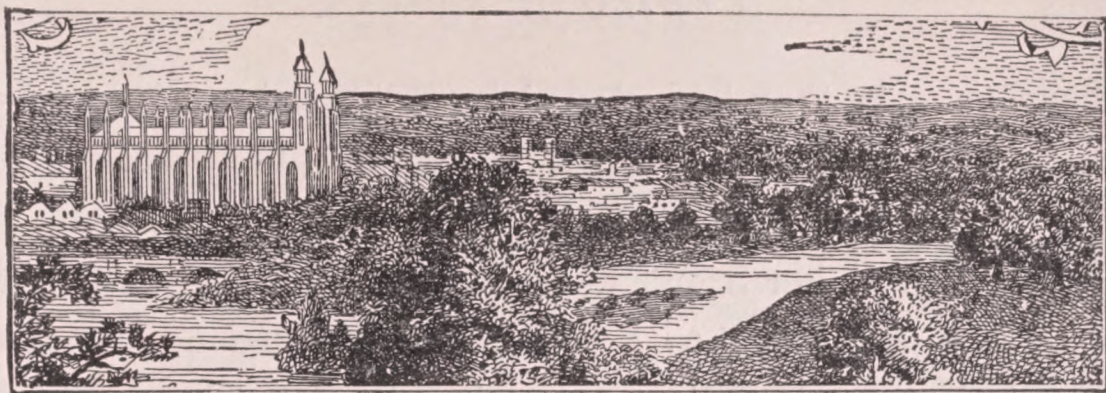
The story unfolded before Janie's pure heart in all its harrowing and repulsive details. It was a story to make her shudder, knowing so well many of the shifting scenes that had been enacted before her own gaze, and in which she had participated. In her silent heart she thanked her God that she had escaped the toils that had been set for her, giving

all the credit in the moment to the Divine influence that she had accepted as a part of her daily life.

To-day and in this hour, new hope had come to Stella, lifting her heart and desires to the presence of the God of purity in human nature, that alone elevates it and emancipates from sin and degradation. Janie's gentle act of forgiveness, and her hopeful words of encouragement had turned her to the solemn resolution of a better life. She felt an innate strength of character grow in the moment, and there seemed to flash before her eyes a new sunlight, that swept her heart with joy. It was a strange and new awakening that seemed to light the way to future happiness. We can believe that it was the light that comes through the Author of the moral forces permeating human destiny—a light that awaits the opening doors of every heart, to dispel its gloom and sorrow and taint of sin. Human experience has taught that those doors can only be opened by the effacement of self; and many times through the sore trials of sorrow. Self stands too often as a relentless sentinel barring the approach of friends or instrumentalities that would open up to the light the dim recesses of the heart.

"You will not leave me, Janie, will you?" Stella cried, now realizing the force of her thoughts and emotions and dependence upon Janie. She clung to her as the only hope upon which she could rely.

And as Janie was leaving the house, she was met by the mother's tender face at the door, and she felt the warm pressure of her hand, and caught her broken words: "God bless you, Janie! You are as a ministering angel to our home!"



CHAPTER XIV.

THE WEARY AT REST.

STELLA grew into Janie's life more and more closely with each passing day. In this blending of hopes and desires Stella gradually lost the sting of her own heart-reproaches, and slowly emerged from settled gloom and retirement. Janie's self-imposed mission was sanctioned by all the villagers, and a spirit of reverence for her beautiful devotion to the one whose hate had wounded her, led them to bless and love her. In her good work she was unconscious of other approval than that of her Heavenly Father and her own pure heart. Her unselfish impulses passed to others, and called to aid their efforts of consolation as well, until, in time, Stella realized that a forgiving spirit lingered, like the pure sunlight and glowing warmth of the atmosphere, about her.

In the presence of this transformation of sentiment, Stella grew into a lingering contrast of her own and Janie's impulses, and studied as she had never done before the source from whence had sprung her disinterested and spontaneous

devotion. As they had played in childhood, or lingered on the border of young maidenhood together, their harmonious and unirritating association had not called to mind the impulses back of her friend's daily acts and kindly ways. But as she now grew into a perfect dependence upon Janie's association for happiness, she silently struggled with the secret. One mystery after another was solved in the glare of the new light that now surrounded her. The first pleasant realization was that of her unselfish spirit; then her forgiving tendency; then her sincere tenderness of heart, that suffered with the sufferings of others—a sympathy one could not doubt; then an underlying purity that could not live in the presence of sin or taint of the passions; and then, and doubtless the most beautiful of her graces, came to her understanding her faith in God, upon which all the rest were builded as upon a solid rock.

Then broke upon her mind, like a beautiful light lighting up the assurance, the source of her love of nature, that she had so strangely ascribed to childishness and weakness of character. She had never until now understood her friend. She had been impatient with her, tolerating her peculiarities as diverting amusement; but now how beautiful they had become to her; how immeasurably sacred were they; how infinitely exalted above her own worldly wisdom and impulses!

Without Janie, in all probability, Stella would have drifted on into abandonment; for her impulses were naturally stronger than her will, and the false step she had taken would have led to others. She had felt herself an outcast on her return to her home; and with blighted hopes

and the sense of disgrace pushing her on, she would have gravitated to a lower level, or lingered in a life of blighting sorrow and remorseful reproaches. Such is but the life-history of many a lovely wreck. Sin can not save from sin and degradation; for it defiles and corrupts all it touches. Moral forces have the power only to purge the heart of evil.

The contrast of lives thus illustrates the forces at work to destroy or save human nature in its hurried flight from the cradle to the grave. Womanly nature seldom recovers from disgrace. Gradually Stella awaked to these truths as she witnessed the forgiving sympathy of her old associates, inspired by Janie's gentle and tender ministrations. Her heart softened from rebellion to a submissive acceptance of God's presence in her life. She realized now that she had been saved from sin and a life of hopeless misery that had awaited her bondage with Ludlow. It was not Janie alone, but the Divine Spirit that had reached out to save her, and turn the current of her desires into a new channel.

Would that the true force of such lives could be made to appear so clearly as to warn young, unsuspecting womanhood from the first dalliance with sin! The child, in its first efforts to walk, does not master the art, and break into a run, more quickly than the innocent soul taking its first steps in sin, and then into a headlong rush to destruction. The picture of Janie's and Stella's lives is not unreal. Janie's life is not an exaggerated one. She but prefigures the impulses of every other pure and refined and godlike nature. Such characters stand out clearly defined in every community, and are lights illumining happy homes everywhere. They are recognized in mothers, sisters, wives; in the untiring

ministrations of the nurse and missionary ; in the self-sacrificing workers among the slums and pitfalls of the outcast. There is a noble side to human nature, exalted by the touch of Divinity, that can not be denied.

Janie and Stella had reached the station in their careers where the contrast of lives can be drawn to best advantage, where Stella's weakness of character had changed to strength, where her impulses and evil propensities had become effaced. Janie's part in the good work speaks for itself. It is an appeal to the better nature in young womanhood that it may escape the snare that is set for all ; and a still stronger appeal against the entertainment of the tempter's presence in any form. Life will be foul or fair as the choice is made.

Together Stella and Janie ministered to the growing physical and mental weakness of Mrs. Ludlow. Her only smiles feebly played upon her dismal face in their presence. She seemed to linger on the verge of life in a helpless way. No hopes or longings ever crept into her frozen heart, or found expression upon her parched lips. Hers was a silent abandonment of life, feebly sustained by the mechanical operations of exhausted nature. The hopes and desires and emotions had gone before the breath. It was the withered shell that lingered behind. With Charley's death the last ray of light had been extinguished. She had clung to him in her poverty and neglect and consciousness of evil, and would not believe him unkind or forgetful. But she was at last blighted, and lingered for a while, a withered stock for the frosts of age to nip at. In ministering to this poor stranded human wreck, Janie and Stella now vied with each other in earnest rivalry. The old lady's life was eased





"Now the three were, as usual, on the porch together."

—Page 165.

of many a heartache and physical discomfort by their gentle acts. Their reward was an occasional sad smile and smothered words of gratitude, and in witnessing her peaceful contentment as they lingered about her.

Months have passed since the death of Ludlow. There seemed to have been an effacement of his memory from the hearts of all in the brief while. His presence lingered in Stella's silent thoughts, but the pain had gone from the heart. They had known so little of true happiness in their brief marriage relationship, that now the past came back as more of a dream, shadowed by an undefined oppressive feeling—an oppression that lingers after an awakening, without the ability to recall the nightmare that had made it somber.

It was midsummer again and the heat was intense. To catch the listless breeze that came up from the valley with the waning of the day, each one would seek the shelter of their shaded porches. Together Janie and Stella would lead the old mother to her high-backed rocking-chair, and gently place her in the folds of its soft cushions. Her uncomplaining words would then be poured out in unintelligible sentences for a time, mingled with feeble smiles. Then all sounds would be hushed, and her vacant stare would linger into space. Though Janie and Stella would then converse in freedom, no topic or tone of voice would arouse her from her vacancy or lethargy.

Now the three were, as usual, on the porch together—the one intently silent, the other two in light conversation. Some remark had turned their thoughts upon the responsibility of the young to themselves. Stella had said that, “It was difficult to solve the problem as to how far human acts

could be trusted," and a shadow of pain lingered on her face in the presence of the thoughts thus aroused.

"Responsibility to one's self is measured by one's responsibility to God's demands," answered Janie with a smile. Then she added, as from a sudden impulse: "There can be no compromise with license without danger of defilement."

In the instant she felt that their light talk had suddenly halted in the face of Stella's lingering self-reproaches—that to speak freely and boldly might open painful wounds that she had hoped were entirely cured. She was uncertain of the real import of Stella's thought, and now silently awaited her further expression.

Stella seemed slow in speaking again, and remained so long deeply rapt in silent thought that Janie feared the little she had said had pained her. Then she hastened to say:

"Forgive me, Stella! Perhaps I spoke without thinking."

Stella looked up into Janie's face as if awaking from a dream, struggling to recall its fleeting memory. Then she answered, abstractedly:

"It is so strange! Shadowy dreams and what we do, so mistily blend. It is hard at times to tell where one ends and the other begins."

Janie caught the thought with exultant eagerness.

"Yes," she answered, "that is the sentiment that has ever seemed to etherealize the life of earth and mistily blend it with the life beyond the cares and pitfalls and tormenting memories here. They all are the shadowy dreams that will fade away as the new and beautiful light shall break upon

the vision after a while. It will be the happy thoughts, the memory of the beauties of God's presence in lovely nature, the approving conscience, the assurances of untainted acts, that will remind us of what we have been and what we have done."

Her words were answered by a lingering smile from Stella's expressive face, and a tender gaze that seemed to dwell upon Janie's calm look as upon an absorbing mystery.

The old mother, rocking so lightly in her chair that it seemed scarce to move, turned her vacant look towards the two, as Janie ceased to speak, and a pitiful but bright smile lit up her wasted features in their presence. She moved as if to speak—then feebly lifted her withered hand as if to point to something out in space—and then laid her wearied head back upon the cushion, and closed her eyes to sleep. It was her final sleep, so quiet and reposeful that the two were now hushed into silence, fearing to wake her. The weary one was at rest. The gentle hand of death had come so quietly to bear away the tired spirit, that the body felt no pang; and the breath ceased, as the gentle zephyr fades in the fervent heat of the wasted summer day.

Janie and Stella talked in whispers, and the mother slept quietly on. The sun sank beneath the western horizon in the luminous mist that hung about the distant sky; the shades of evening crept silently over the valley, and up to the hilltop, and hid the neighboring woods in shadows—and still she slept on peacefully and undisturbed. Then, the two would prepare her for the night's broken slumber, as they thought, and wondered at the long and placid sleep, in which she seemed so firmly locked, as they

looked upon her piteously, tenderly. They would arouse her, and lamented that they could not let her rest—her sleep was so quiet and undisturbed. Together, in the dim twilight, they stepped to her side to assist her feeble steps, as usual. They gently touched her passive hands; but they were strangely cold. They had left her too long in the night air—she had become chilled in her deep sleep, they reproachfully said to themselves. Then they gently shook her light form; but she would not arouse. They were bewildered, and became suddenly alarmed. They looked close into her set eyes, over which the rigid lids were half closed. Then the affright of death came to both in the instant. “She is dead!” they exclaimed as with one voice. Her sorrows had ended. The sins of the wayward boy had spent their force on the mother at last. She would now lie humbly by his side, to whom she had clung through all her afflictions.

The neighbors tenderly prepared her for the rest her wearied spirit had longed for; and laid her away in her little earthy bed beside her wayward son, and hallowed the parting by many a tear. Hers had been a life of desolation, yet of unshaken faith in her boy. As an infant, his innocent smiles had exalted her; as a child, his prattling tongue had reconciled her to her poverty; as a young man, his beauty and promise had cheered her fainting spirits with fond hopes; and then, when he had, like a serpent, stung her to the heart, poisoning her life, she still clung to him. His sin had wrought its sad work upon her sorrowful life, and death was at last a refuge and release from pain.

How often are young men the terrible executioners of their own mothers—killing, not only the body, but blight-

ing every hope and happiness! The picture is a sad one. The example thus portrayed is of daily occurrence. Willfully? Perhaps not. When the dalliance with sin was first indulged, there was no thought of future degradation and death. When drink had gained the mastery; when the brutal passions had overcome the manhood; when helpless degradation had effaced the nobility natural to human nature,—then the horrors of the end overshadowed, not only the sin-cursed one, but those near and dear as well. Sin is not single-handed, resting only on the victim, but reaches out to innocent ones, who suffer most.

Stella thought much in this way, in the sad days following the death of the blasted life to which she had ministered so kindly. She realized the force of her own actions upon her own home, as keenly as now she realized that of Charley upon the life of his poor mother. She looked upon life as she had never done before, and sadly repented over the past. She looked at Janie's undisturbed equanimity of character with an engrossing fascination, in this added trial. She had no smittings of conscience to disturb her, no regrets, no consciousness of injury to others, no assurance of heartaches and wounded sensibilities. Her step was light, her smiles were bright and pure, her heart was untainted, her home-life unclouded.

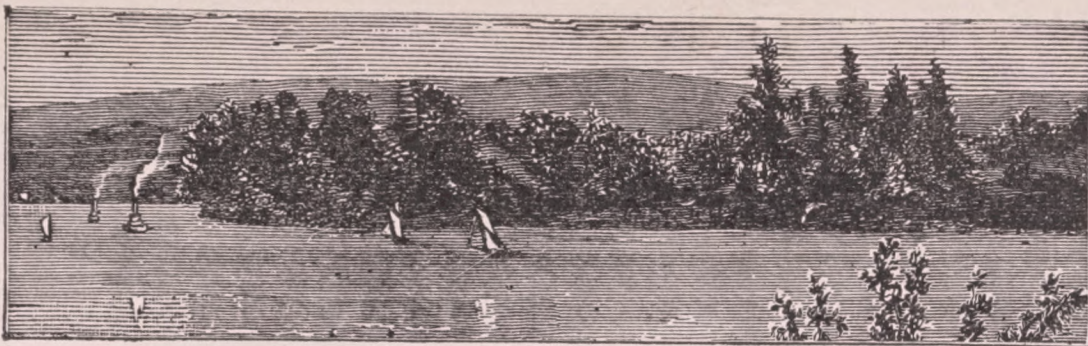
O, how Stella clung to Janie now in the tumult of her reproachful contrasts! The storms that had prematurely aged her could not touch her friend; for the purity of the flowers she loved so dearly seemed to cling to her and give out their beauty and fragrance in her spotless unselfishness. That purity and beauty was born of moral

sentiments glorified by divine purity—not from sin, with the horrors of perdition clinging to it.

Stella sat one evening, soon after the burial of Mrs. Ludlow, and watched, from the porch, the sun sinking behind a black stormcloud that rose ominously in masses from the west. It was all scarred over with lightning flashes, and was terrible with threatening destruction. She watched tremblingly the whirling masses climbing higher and higher over all the sky, and saw the trees bend, and felt the earth shaken by the tempest. Then the beautiful thought broke upon her affrighted senses, that on the morrow the sun would rise again in beauty and brightness, and the world would know nothing of the storm that had swept over it. And so she thought of the sunlight of eternity after the storms and death of the present life. All would be beautiful again, and calm and peaceful.

The sun has now risen above the storm that had passed over the lives as depicted in our story, and henceforth its bright face only will appear.





CHAPTER XV.

LAKESIDE.

IT was the middle of July. In the evenings of this season, with the sun's approach to the horizon, delicious breezes usually came in cooling puffs from out the west, that were like kisses upon the face from the vault overhead. The skies of evening were blue and light, softening into golden splendors that lingered long after the sun's face had melted into the horizon. At such an hour Janie and Stella loved to wander together along the gentle slope of the hill, and dwell upon the beauties of the splendid spectacle. When flocks of clouds would add their beauty, and hang suspended in fleecy lightness upon the motionless air, the sumptuous colors of the setting sun would play about their soft undulations in weird magnificence. Then Janie's heart would beat in quickened throbs with the shifting beauties lingering before her eyes on fields and forests, hills and sky. Her thoughts were like glittering threads binding her to nature's amazing wonders, and then intertwining with the beautiful assurances that the consummate skill of Divine purity and wisdom alone could paint the matchless pictures.

Janie loved this walk for the beauties which so deeply affected her sensitive nature, and for her unaccountable emotions, which seemed like flashes from the heavens and the blended scenes about her. Stella's receptive heart, softened by the refinements of Janie's tender influence, seemed to catch the loveliness of nature, too, in something of her enraptured spirit, and a kindred pleasure bound them together in indissoluble ties. It was a quiet, undisturbed, peaceful happiness of the heart. They were aimlessly wandering along the highway now, absorbed by little snatches of talk that were ever interrupted by the more absorbing beauties around them. It was a peaceful, uncomplaining association that could know no bitterness as twice before.

Stella wore the deeply somber habiliments of mourning, and the blackness of the attire deepened the soberness of her face that was outlined in sorrow. Janie's pure white summer costume—her golden hair crowning her shapely head and lighting up her perfectly clear complexion—was in striking contrast. The play of emotions upon her refined features suggested to Stella's mind the beautiful sunlight among the fields of yellow grain and the dancing leaves swayed by gentle winds.

Stella was wearied by their walk, and now halted languidly before a decaying log, lying by the roadside.

"Let us rest here awhile," she said to Janie. "I believe I am tired," she added, with a light laugh.

"You look so, dear," Janie answered, with solicitude, and gently assisted her to a seat.

"I can't account for my languid feelings," Stella said, with a wearied expression. "I am not at all like myself.

My old strength seems to have deserted me," she continued, with a smile of resignation.

Janie looked into Stella's face compassionately, and then, taking her hand, began to stroke it. This act was a peculiarity of hers when moved by tender sympathy. It seemed that thus she could touch the sorrow of another, and dispel it as by a mesmeric effort. At all events, she could thus, she knew, give off something of her own will, and soothe by her own gentle tenderness. While she shrank, in her sensitive way from referring to the events that had wearied Stella's spirits, and, through the spirits, her physical strength, she could not but gently speak of her cause of weakness. She had an object in view in doing so.

"It could not be otherwise, Stella," she said. "Poor human nature can bear a certain amount of strain only, and then it gives way. You need the tonic of a change, my dear, from the associations that have oppressed and weakened you;" and then looking earnestly into her friend's interested face, still clinging to her hand, she added with decision: "I am going to take you away from here for a while."

Stella returned the look with an appearance of perplexity. She was striving to understand Janie's words.

"Are you surprised at what I say?" asked Janie, interrupting her studied thoughts.

"Yes," she answered; "and yet I ought not to be surprised at anything you do. You are so full of resources and good intentions. Would that I could look down into your tender heart to see what it is made of!" she exclaimed.

Janie laughed and patted Stella's cheek softly. "You

would find nothing different there from your own, dear. You would do as much for me, I know, as I for you. The only difference is, I have the opportunity, and you have not; and for that I am happy!" she said, as with a light bound of the heart.

Stella felt the burden of her indebtedness and the weight of her desires responding as an echo from her grateful heart to Janie's exultant remark. It was with an intently yearning look that she replied:

"Would that I could prove how much I would do for you! My heart aches for the opportunity!" she said earnestly. "I would gladly give my life as a sacrifice for your generous devotion; for you have taught me how to live, and what to live for."

For a moment Janie was overcome by the unexpected fervency of Stella's words. The sincerity of her look sank into her heart, and played with the cords of love that now bound them together, and seemed to tighten the strand still more tensely. Then she answered:

"I could not afford to share the pleasure of loving and doing for you, Stella. The joy of it is as unstinted as the winds of heaven among the verdure of the trees; and is not more restrained than the generous sunlight that thrills with warmth whatever it touches. Do not look upon me as needing repayment in the sense of a debtor. My pleasure is in giving to others. An effort at compensation would rob my heart of its purest happiness."

Stella's earnest gaze rested upon Janie's face as she spoke, and when her concluding words had ended as in a whisper, she exclaimed, with trembling earnestness:

"But I can love you, Janie, with a love that knows no

limit. You know, you precious little thing, that it is all yours. It has no taint in it," and then drew Janie close to her side, and seemed to cling to her.

"I know it all, Stella," Janie answered, with a light, rippling laugh, "and I am happy in its possession—inexpressibly happy." Her gleaming smile outrivalled the beauties gathering on the western sky among the changing tints of color that the setting sun was scattering through the vault and over the earthly scenery spread out so reposefully before them.

This quick outpouring of love, and these unchecked confessions, came to both without premeditated thought. A sudden impulse had burst the barriers that were like a pent-up stream restrained by a bank that had been gradually giving way for a length of time, and then suddenly yielding before the rush of the eager flood behind. It was the promise of Janie to take Stella away from her present burdensome surroundings that had opened up their hearts to each other in such an emotional way.

They talked on, and the play of nature grew in beauty before them; but it was unheeded. And yet the wide expanse of nature seemed strangely satisfying to them; and they unconsciously felt the wondrous freedom of the great vault of heaven above them, filled by the spirit of loveliness which seemed to have settled upon their hearts.

"Yes, yes, Stella; you must go away with me for awhile, where rest and a change can divert, and where memory can be stifled, and where grief and sorrow can not intrude. New scenes and thoughts must take the place of the old," Janie pleaded, with earnest encouragement.

"Can such a place be found?" asked Stella, with a look of dumb questioning.

"Do you remember the place where we were all to have summered two years ago?"

"And which your mother's sickness prevented?"

"Yes; Lakeside," Janie answered, with enthusiasm. "You know how much we then regretted the breaking of our plans, and how we hopefully encouraged ourselves at the time with the assurance that another season would do as well."

"I remember," Stella answered, wistfully; "but all hope of that was resigned long ago. I did think then that the future might be thus happy; but not now," she added, gloomily shaking her head.

"Well, we will revive the hope now, and prove that the waiting has been good for all of us."

"O, you are too encouraging, Janie," answered Stella, eagerly. "I own that the change would be a blessing with your presence to shelter me. Somehow, no place or pleasure would be satisfying without you," she continued, with a trustful look into Janie's happy face. "I am entirely dependent on you, as if self-effacement had come to me in my helpless dependence," she added, with deep feeling.

Without noticing Stella's sad complaint, Janie replied:

"It is just such a quiet, restful, sheltering place as will be best suited to both of us. My own heart yearns for the place strangely," she said with a long, dreamy look out over the valley that was growing dim now in the shades of the lingering twilight.

A brief silence rested then upon their heart-thoughts.

Evidently Stella's languid feelings had been deeply stirred; for in a few moments she turned her misty eyes, dim with tears, upon Janie, and said:

"This is sudden. Hope may cheer or disappoint. Others are to decide which it shall be. You have aroused an intense desire, Janie, that I long to realize. Help me, dear, if you can!"

In that cry Janie realized that her plans would be reached; that Stella's apathy and dread of mingling with others would be overcome, and her heart responded to the happiness shining in her eyes.

The quiet hush of the country air, that seems to grow into drowsiness with the deepening twilight, now settled upon the two with impressive effect. The beautiful colors of the departing sun were fast fading into the gray of the night. A solitary robin sat on the fence near by, whistling its few clear notes, as if with a parting blessing upon the outgoing day. Its lovely mate flew to the grass a few paces away, and turning its red breast towards them, looked for a moment into their faces tamely, and then, in confident freedom, began its search for the evening meal. Pausing every moment or two, after each few hurried steps, it would stand with head high to gaze at its guests. Janie was delighted with its untamed ways, and endearingly talked to it, as she did so often to her flowers. When, at last, it flew away to join the flight of its mate, she arose and helped Stella to her feet; and together they turned their faces homeward, still talking over the anticipated pleasures of the distant lake.

At her evening meal, Janie unfolded her plans to her

father and mother. Their faces caught the pleasure that was reflected from her happy countenance, and made it brighter still by a hearty acquiescence in her desires.

Upon Stella's porch, soon after, the subject was renewed, and but little urging was necessary to win the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Bradley to the project. Difficulties all vanished, as the mist before the sun, in Janie's presence. All felt that, if Janie could do so much, they could do no less for the hapless and wounded heart.

As the sun of this day had set in peaceful beauty upon the earth, so the day had closed in happy contentment to the hearts of the two friends.

A few brief days of preparation brought them to the close of July; and on the evening of a lovely day they halted at the little plain depot, hid among the forest-trees that overshadowed it just without the gateway opening into the great inclosure of Lakeside. They paused at the entrance for tickets of admission, and to their eyes a great native forest spread out before them, where, through the vista of trees, could be seen pretty cottages nestling here and there in the distant evening shade.

They walked on interestedly, following the white pathway in its windings, until the clustering settlement of cottages was reached. Their diversity of forms, the freedom of the people lingering about their little porches, the sociable character of intercourse, and the sylvan, homelike air of the place, diverted them as they slowly sauntered towards the lake. An impression of pleasing listlessness came to them in their passing review. And then, a little way beyond, the quiet, misty lake spread out before them

into the dim distance, where little row-boats seemed slowly creeping about over its glassy surface. They paused to catch the effect of the sleepy, placid water, that was instantly soothing to them in the dimness of the gathering night.

Then, to the left, but a few paces away, stood the inviting hotel, already gleaming with lights, surrounded by forest-trees. They mounted the steps, and their eyes quickly caught the homelike freedom of the guests, chatting in groups about the open hall; the other groups sitting on the wide veranda in happy intimacy; and others scattered about the open grounds leading to the lake, visible through the windows,—and they were impressed by the singular freedom and unrestraint, that was reassuring. The sound of music added to the charm, as it floated in softened harmony from the grove but a little way from the hotel. Their introduction was a delightful one. They scarce could delay over their toilets or evening meal, in eagerness to explore the grounds and know more of the homelike charm of their surroundings. Though the darkness of night hid much from view, their eager fancy looked through the veil, and wove beautiful pictures, that lingered about their undisturbed dreams of sleep.

The morning awaking was radiant with sunlight, that poured in an unstinted flood through the slats of their window-shutters. It could not be kept out of their room or their hearts; for neither was sealed against its penetrating and blithesome effects. They opened wide the shutters and admitted the full glare of its dazzling face, and caught with delight its silvery rays, dancing upon the wavelets of the

lake. Out over the water it was lighting up the distant wooded islands with a lingering halo.

The long line of black smoke, that streamed from the stack of an approaching steamer miles away, alone broke the gleaming brightness of the scene. Long did Stella and Janie linger in the open window, spellbound by nature's awaking loveliness. Janie felt the impress deeply, and in speechless wonder caught one and another of the tender effects of the sun's rays at play with sky and water, the islands and groves around. Neither Stella nor Janie could break the spell and the silence for a time. But where were sorrows now, and burdened thoughts, and torturing heartaches? All had mysteriously vanished in the presence of this radiant play of sunlight upon nature's face before them. In the silence and beauty of this early morn new hopes seemed to have arisen to their light hearts, awaking a thrill that, perhaps, was an antepast of the day's brighter offerings yet to come.





CHAPTER XVI.

AN EVENTFUL DAY.

JANIE and Stella were now drawn together in a closer intimacy than ever before, and one became the shadow, as it were, of the other. This close companionship attracted attention early, and became to all a subject of remark and pleasing interest. It was soon apparent that one had been deeply smitten by sorrow, and that the other was an attendant spirit of consolation and sympathy. Their undemonstrative devotion to each other became lovely in the eyes of all, and drew to them a gentle, respectful solicitude that was touching to the hearts of both. A romance attached itself to them at first sight; for the refinement of their gentle and loving ways was impressive.

After the breakfast following this first beautiful morning, they were met in the large hall, as they stepped from the dining-room, by a pleasing face and an extended hand of welcome. The barrier of formality thus broken, the introduction passed round the group of ladies, who seemed unrestrainedly to accept them to their friendship and association.

Then they began their explorations together. They wandered, with light and happy hearts, to the lake-front, to the little boat-house, out upon the dock, along the rock-fringed bluffs that were lifted but a little way above the murmuring water, among the overarching trees that sheltered from the hot sun-rays. It seemed to them the sunniest, shadiest, sleepest of places; and they lingered in a loitering, drowsy enjoyment.

If the faintest thoughts of the past still remained in their minds, they had no tormenting power now. Mental pleasures at the Auditorium by day and social enjoyments at night conspired still more to weave the spell of oblivion about them. By the inclosing fences, the world was shut out from its tumult and strife and trouble; and it was only the daily steamers touching at the dock, or the distant whistle and faint rumble of trains, that broke the dreamy and emotional state, and reminded them that they were not wholly removed from its contact. A settled quietude rested upon them from the face of beautiful nature, as well as from the peaceful serenity of their undisturbed thoughts.

The days passed thus for a full week. They had slipped away so silently and peacefully that they had been unheeded. The gentle intimacy and unaffected friendship of their new-found acquaintances were so unobtrusive as to leave upon their minds but the impress of homelike unrestraint. Before the week had passed, both had forgotten that the world of tumult still existed about them, or that sorrow or pain could torture anywhere. They were truly at rest now, and in beautiful harmony with lovely nature, that seemed to conspire to work out its most entrancing effects upon the

morning and evening skies. Nearer and dearer grew the clinging love of Stella the while. No joy to her heart but with Janie's participation; and together they shared their close companionship with new-found friends. No happiness for one that the other did not know.

On a Wednesday evening the hotel was deserted for a lovely concert at the Auditorium. The evening boat had been delayed, and its few passengers now aimlessly lingered about its deserted hall and porches with a sense of oppressive loneliness. But when the throng, like a tide, set toward the hotel at the conclusion of the concert, with its noise and laughter and bustle, the scene changed, and even the strangers partook of its gayety and brightness. Stella and Janie drifted homeward at last, and, with arms entwined about each other, entered the great hall with faces wreathed in smiles, chatting in happy lightness, as if the melody of the music still played about their hearts. Thus they approached the clerk's desk, to inquire for the evening mail. A throng had gathered there, and they paused upon its outskirts, still talking about the music.

But why the sudden pressure of Stella's arm about Janie's waist now? and her arrested speech, and trembling hands, and shaken form, and blanched face, and staring eyes? Startled, Janie looked into Stella's face, and the presence of her sudden agitation affrighted her.

"What is it, Stella?" Janie breathlessly exclaimed, taking a firm hold of her arm as if to support her.

The sudden change in Stella had been unnoticed by the throng at the desk in their eager diversion; and Stella did not reply to her affrighted exclamation.

Again and again, in deepest solicitude, Janie asked her question.

"Tell me! Tell me, Stella!" she pleaded, "what has affected you?"

And then her eager questionings were answered by another, who now stood before the two with uncovered head, and a look of unspeakable surprise and delight. It was only when Professor Wentworth had extended his hand that Janie recognized him. Then she too was agitated, but not as Stella. No self-reproaches had arisen suddenly, like horrible specters, before her gaze. It was the happy remembrance of lovely flowers, and the music of the drawing-room, and his kindly look, that had again lit up his rugged face, beautiful with the interest and smiles of then, to greet her anew. The past swept over her, in an instant, as she felt the eager and firm pressure of his hand in its greeting; and its warmth effaced, in the moment, the memory of his relaxed grip at their final separation months ago. Then she seemed to hear with a muffled sound his words of greeting.

Stella had separated from her, and now stood aside in a shrinking way, with scarlet face, in an agony of self-condemnation. The flood of thoughts and the quick scene were like a flash before Janie's awakened senses, and remained unnoticed to the chatting friends still absorbed in light pleasantry about the desk. Janie, in pain, looked upon the shrinking form, and pitied Stella and welcomed Mr. Wentworth in the instant with one thought.

"Of all my pleasure, since leaving my country months ago, this is the greatest; for it is the most unexpected," Professor Wentworth said, before relinquishing Janie's hand.

It was her bright and happy look that gave back the pleasant assurance to his heart that the meeting was a happy one to her; for as yet she had not spoken. She was contending with tender sympathy for Stella as the music of his words fell upon her hearing. Then she saw Stella move as if to leave them, and this aroused her as nothing before had done.

"Stella!" she quickly called.

Stella hesitated at the call, and turned her sad face upon Janie in mute appeal.

"Stella!" she called again, with a voice of distress.

The call could not be resisted. She turned back to the two, with a look of suffering.

"You must recognize my friend, Mrs. Ludlow," Janie said, with a tremor of the voice that caught the professor's ears.

These were her first words of greeting. They fell upon Stella's heart with sounds sweeter than the music that had entranced the senses in the past hour. In the same instant the professor recalled the face, and the bitter words that had given him pain among the dreary wastes of Siberia; and he stood mutely, a startled witness of the forgiving spirit of the little friend of that day, whose suffering image he had carried with him in his heart—first, to reproach his suspicions, and then to brighten his dreary solitude. Her attitude and manner banished, in the same instant, whatever of reproach had come back with the recognition. He extended his hand to Stella, and greeted her with the same freedom that he had shown to Janie; and the same smile of pleasure seemed to play upon his face the while.

"I can not express my pleasure in meeting you both

again," he said to Stella. "The meeting is of that unexpected character that bewilders."

Stella was more at ease in the kind words which seemed to be for both alike; and her winning smiles began to play about her face again; and her arm stole, as before, about Janie's waist, but in a more clinging way than ever. In the moment she felt that the loyalty of Janie's affection had been tested to its utmost strain, as her cruel treachery was recalled to life by the presence of this noble man, whose suspicions she once had aroused. Not a trace of reproach could she detect in Janie's manner, in her quick and penetrating gaze. Instead, before even a word had been spoken to the friend, the effort was made to banish the presence of sorrow from offended and offender alike. It was a wondrous self-forgetfulness she saw.

A good impulse swept over Stella in a moment, as from an inspiration, and with a brighter look than Janie had ever remembered, she said:

"I am happier than Janie can be in our unexpected meeting. It rounds out the day that has been so pleasant to both of us. Neither of us could have thought more could possibly be added to its joy, until this moment."

She spoke so freely—even eagerly—and with such an undisguised excitement, that both Janie and the professor looked at her with surprise.

He pleasantly answered that it was the crowning joy, too, of his happy day.

And Janie silently wondered, as he spoke, if Stella's manner indicated a sudden arousing of her old, unrestrained, and impulsive self.

But she was unhappy in the thought, and lightly dispelled it with a rippling laugh, as she answered:

“You can not know, Professor Wentworth, the full force of Stella’s words; for the reason that you can not understand how truly perfect has been our pleasure to-day. Not a moment, from sunrise to sunset, but has been a delight.”

He looked down into Janie’s speaking eyes, and lingered upon the play of her features, as under the influence of a fascination. Janie recognized the same expression of countenance that had pleased her so much as they had talked together on the evening preceding the sleigh-ride. The pure pleasures of that night surged over her heart—thoughts before she had completed her concluding sentence.

And then the crowd around them began to give way, and one and another were drawn to the grand presence of the gentleman so earnestly absorbed in his attentions to the two; and after a little the three stood alone, forgetful of the interested groups who had now made them objects of discussion.

Stella was bewildered at the cordial freedom and gentle refinement of the man as she stood before him and studied his face in these few moments of greeting; for gentleness and exquisite refinement seemed to illumine his rugged features. With what other impulses she looked upon him now than when last she had spoken to him at her home, moved by hate and a revengeful spirit. She felt a happy exultation in the assurance that she did not now think as then. Instead, she was almost convulsed by an eager desire that seemed to thrill her being with strong resolutions. The sentiment seemed to lift her up and transform her to intense eagerness for the

attainment of an object—an object outweighing all love for her own life. These were quick thoughts that had come unbidden, and she knew not from whence; but they gave her unspeakable happiness.

The groups about them divined, from the manner of the two friends, that Stella was the one in whom the gentleman was most interested; for her eager impulses were in striking contrast to the quiet and gentle undemonstrativeness of the other.

At length Janie seemed to awake to the fact that she had not inquired about himself. She had listened, forgetful of all else about her, to his expressions of pleasure in the meeting; of his assurances of her unchanged appearance in his absence; of his remembrance of her little musical surprise upon the last evening he had spent among his friends—the effect of which he had carried away with him among the solitudes of his wanderings. He talked on eagerly as if telling the story to Stella, watching, the while, the changing color that played upon Janie's face under the touch of her emotions.

Then she laughingly interrupted the progress of the story, dreading that he might unguardedly refer to the sleigh-ride, that seemed to her but a link in the events he was recalling now. She said with exquisite grace:

“But, in thinking of us, you forget, Professor Wentworth, to tell us how you have happened, in your flight, to alight in this secluded spot. We are more interested in your adventurous movements than in our own uneventful acts. You have not said, as yet, one word about yourself;” and she paused in an attentive, expectant attitude for the interesting narrative.

"Well," he answered, in a half-tantalizing way, "my interest in myself to-night is entirely overshadowed by the greater interest in yourselves. I have something more pleasing to think about than self. Yours happen to be the first faces to greet me from my home in the past lingering months. Home seems reflected from your faces, and thoughts of that place linger about your pleasant smiles," he said, with an earnestness of manner, that seemed in the instant to efface the pleasing banter with which he had begun his answer.

"Still," Janie replied, in the same graceful way, "we are, indeed, deeply interested in the circumstances that have impelled your flight to this spot."

"You shall know," he said; "my work called me to Sandusky for a day. That completed, I thought to take refuge from the world, and came here for the rest I have been longing for since landing on our shores again. I desired to rest before beginning the most difficult part of my task, that of writing up its detailed report for publication. It has been some good angel hand that has drawn me here," he added, with a look that reminded Janie of his simple faith that had touched her heart once before. Then he said:

"Would you not like to go out into the cool air? We can talk with more freedom than beneath the lamplights."

A great cloud mass, that seemed to tower into the heavens, rested, solitary and alone, in the northern sky; and across its beautiful face, that shone bright in the moonlight, shot back and forth swift-flying streaks of lightning, as if chasing each other in play. Occasionally, a streak in its quick flight would leap out into the clear sky beyond the cloud mass. It was a lovely sight, that caught the instant

gaze of the group as they stepped out upon the porch. For the moment they were lost to all other thoughts in the presence of this beautiful display. They carried chairs to the edge of the little bluff overlooking the silvery water, glinting in the soft moonlight, where an unobstructed view could be had of the lovely spectacle. And here they lingered long over the beauties of the night, and over the story told by the professor.

Much of the strange story of lonely wanderings was reviewed before they separated for the night. Just as they would have said good-night, Stella asked Mr. Wentworth if he would remain for a length of time.

"O no," he replied; "my time is limited by the force of much work driving me on. Early on Monday morning I must go to Chicago, and from there to Denver, and from thence—I know not where. Orders will reach me at Denver, directing my future movements;" and then added, soberly, "I deeply regret that I can not linger here awhile, at least."

A shade of anxiety seemed to pass over Stella's face at the announcement. She seemed sobered by it, and spoke something of her feeling, when she replied:

"I had hoped your stay would be longer, Professor Wentworth."

Her disappointment was so undisguised that Janie thought strangely of it; and still more strangely as the two climbed the stairs together on their way to retirement. Stella was violently weeping before the door of their room was reached. Nothing that Janie could do would stop her sobs. She had the appearance of one agonized to the point of nervous prostration where hysteria begins. She had

thrown herself upon the bed, on entering the room, and buried her face in the pillow. Sounds were thus stifled; but the convulsive movements of the body went on in a more affecting way; nor could Janie seek help, for Stella frantically resisted it. The storm raged until its fury was spent; the while Janie hung over the afflicted one, and begged and piteously pleaded with her, and strove to take her to her arms, and shed tears, and by all the touching blandishments of her sensitive and tenderly sympathetic nature tried to win her from her sorrow.

Silence had come to the deserted halls of the hotel, in the hour of midnight, before Stella grew calm again. Then she could not name the burden that had convulsed her. Instead, as Janie still tenderly ministered to her troubled spirit, she would throw her arms about her neck and cling to her, and imprint passionate kisses upon her face and forehead.

"No, no! Janie, I can not tell my trouble! Its character is not such that I can name it. I have no secrets from you, dear; but this is something I alone can know. It can not be divided. All my life happiness hangs upon the future now," she cried, with a pathetic earnestness that was painfully depicted upon her unhappy face.

Janie sorrowfully abandoned the subject, grieving that she could not share it with Stella. "All her past sorrows she had softened; why not this?" she thought. But she was measurably consoled in seeing Stella silently kneeling at her bedside now in prayer. "If she will carry her burden to Him, she needs not my help," she continued to think, as she sank upon her own knees in the silent midnight hour to plead for her friend.



CHAPTER XVII.

DOUBTS REMOVED.

THE sun did not burst upon the world with more splendor, or scatter its beauties more prodigally, or linger about the water and misty islands more dreamily, upon that radiant morning of their first awaking at Lakeside, than upon this one of the following day; but it did not arouse the ecstasy of glad surprise in the hearts of the two wearied ones now as upon that morning. Their eyes gazed from their open windows upon the scattered beauties around, but were strangely blurred to the effects that then had thrilled with exalted emotions. Both felt the strangeness of their blunted, irresponsive sensibilities now; and, as they proceeded listlessly in their toilets, both recognized the presence of an oppressive weight upon their hitherto undisturbed feelings. They were tired from the mental and physical strain that had banished sleep from the night, and oppressed with undefined sorrows.

Their preparation for the breakfast was, for the most part, in silence. A nervous excitement was apparent in

every act of Stella; for her few words were spoken haltingly, her hands were unsteady, and her look had a restless, wandering way that impressed Janie strangely. The same dreamy restlessness followed her to the breakfast hall, and was noticed by the family group at the table. Her eyes seemed to wander about the tables as if in an anxious search, followed by Janie's pursuing look under a keen sense of aroused suspicion. Janie began to grow unhappy over the thoughts that now contended with her love for Stella. The secret of the night grew into a settled dread that some plot, mysteriously connected with the past, had shaped itself in Stella's mind; and before the breakfast was ended Janie became, for the first time since entering the quiet precincts of the grove, really unhappy. They arose together from the table, and passed out of the room side by side to the great hall, where Janie, in a subdued voice, said to Stella:

"We have not yet completed our plans for the day. Have you thought over in your mind, Stella, what we shall do? Whether to attend the auditorium, or visit the islands, or go to Sandy Beach?" and stood before her in startled surprise that she should long hesitate in answering, and that such an unaccountable embarrassment should so plainly appear in her manner.

At last Stella, falteringly and chokingly, said:

"I—I—do n't know, Janie, dear. I do n't think I can make any plans for to-day. I think I am not in condition to do anything."

And then she took Janie's hand, and led her passively out on to the porch, and down the broad steps, and along the walk to the front of the lake. They did not speak during

this procedure; and Janie suffered herself to be led as if destitute of resistance. Here they sat down on one of the long benches beneath an overspreading tree.

Then turning to Janie again, with misty eyes and anxious face, she said:

"Forgive m^e, Janie!" and paused as if in a struggle with herself. "You see, dear, I am not like myself this morning," she added, in broken words. "I—I want to be alone, to-day, dear," she continued, now weeping and clinging to Janie as if she had, in the statement, repelled her dear friend and cast her off.

Janie could have borne anything from others, but this sudden change in Stella, and her rejection of her companionship, came too heavily. She sat looking into Stella's face with a dazed expression, swayed by the torturings of the singular estrangement that had so suddenly separated them. Yet she could not deny her friend. She thought that, perhaps, the secret of the night and the silent prayer had inspired the wish; and, moved by her tender, forgiving impulse, she answered:

"If you desire to be alone, Stella, I will not intrude," and with a kindly look and a tone of suffering.

"O, you are so kind, Janie, in yielding now, and without questioning! I will not forget it. It is only for a little while that I want to be alone—only a little while," she repeated. "And then we will be dearer than ever to each other," she said with strange eagerness, clinging to Janie's waist in her ardor of feeling until she almost hurt her. She looked into Janie's sad eyes through her own tear-stained ones, lingeringly; and then exclaimed passionately: "You do n't

mistrust me, dear, do you, Janie? O that would kill me! Do n't, do n't do that, I pray you! After a little you shall know all. I would not hurt the precious life that I cling to more than my own; I would die for you!" she exclaimed, and tore herself abruptly away from Janie, and hurried to the refuge of her room.

Janie was overcome by Stella's inexplicable words and manner, beyond anything that had hitherto crossed their eventful lives. She sat motionless, her eyes fixed upon the restless wavelets that were constantly beating against the rocks at her feet, and her measured heart-throbs were painful. Then she was recalled to herself suddenly by the delicate greeting of Professor Wentworth.

Her saddened face was turned upon him in the moment, under its burden of trouble, and then broke into lovely smiles before his gaze, that transformed her beautiful features as the gray morning mist when suddenly riven by the glowing sunlight. He stood before her in the moment, with thoughts bent upon her grace and sweetness.

"Forgive me," he said. "You recall to my mind, this morning, the endearing pet-name of your friends. Do you remember it? You know we once before alluded to it. Its application is so suggestive now that I can not help recalling it. You are not offended by the reference, I trust;" and he studied intently her features and the play of emotions upon her face as he tarried for a reply

"I can not be offended," she answered; "for I am not responsible for what my friends say of me."

"Their delicate selection of a beautiful pet-name is, however, expressive, and, as I see you now, full of meaning."

"I fear you flatter me," Janie said, with a shadow of distress sweeping across her face.

"I did not recall the remembrance of our little talk at our last meeting in that spirit, but in the pleasing recollection that it had helped to cheer many a lonely night-hour when not a soul was within reach to whom I could speak my thoughts. Then I lived within myself, and feasted upon the sumptuous repasts that memory spread before me in its silent way. The most delicate of such pleasures was the thought of the child of nature in a distant land, who was so unconscious of herself. This is not flattery, indeed, Miss Allen," he said, in answer to her look of distress.

He saw her look of distress vanish then, and her winning smiles return instead.

"I am glad," she gently replied, "that anything attaching to me could have cheered a single moment of your loneliness."

"If I do not say too much—that night and the following day did much to solace many of the lonely hours of that long journey."

Then Janie recalled the last episode of that day, and wondered in her heart how much it had done to add a shadow to his loneliness as well. "Certainly it could not have been pleasant," she thought, as a cloud of sorrow again crossed her face.

It caught his eye, and he impulsively said:

"Your look does not seem to respond to my confessions. Your face now wears the same expression that I noticed when I first spoke to you a few moments ago. I think I would rather see the sunlight of smiles play about it."

This he said as under embarrassment. He realized that he had no right to express a desire touching her moods. Her speaking face reflected so quickly every shade of emotion that he was deeply impressed with the delicacy of her sensitive organization. He was quick to catch the fleeting beauties lingering upon nature's face, in its ever-shifting lights and shades, and his heart seemed always responding to its changes. He realized that Janie's face, as well, could no more disguise the effects of her heart-thoughts than the hill-side meadows the chasing shadows at play with drifting clouds sweeping across the sun's face. His soul was cultivated to the beautiful in nature, and as its most exalted loveliness was typified in Janie's face he followed the sudden impulse of his heart in saying that he would rather see the sunlight there.

She smiled at his words, when he had feared a frown; and she said with thoughtless frankness:

"I have just a little touch of heartache this morning. Perhaps my face bears its shadow. I am sorry."

Her words seemed to sober him in the moment, and the presence of Stella obtruded upon his mind; for he had seen her leave Janie's side in agitation. He was not so much of a courtier, having spent most of his life with nature, where no disguises are nurtured, as now to hide his feelings; and so he answered freely, without weighing words:

"Your friend must have caused that."

Janie started as if affrighted, and made a meaningless reply. She was embarrassed.

"She has a beautiful face," he said, as if his mind were now entirely absorbed in thought of her.

"Yes, very beautiful."

"She is cultivated, is she not?" he asked, with interest.

"Nothing has been spared upon her education."

"And she is refined, as well?" he continued, questioningly, like a man working out a problem in his mind.

For answer, Janie said, with a worried look:

"She is impulsive at times."

Still he sat as if working busily at his problem.

"You and she are great friends, are you not?"

"Yes, almost inseparable," she replied, wondering what such questions could mean.

"And yet, I take it, you are not alike in any particular."

"Still, our differences in character do not intrude upon our perfect confidence and warm friendship."

"Friendship," he repeated, in an undertone; and then, after an embarrassing interval, "you accept friendship freely, I think, Miss Allen."

"Why, of course, certainly, my greatest pleasure in life is to feel friendly to others."

"Yours is an unsuspecting nature. I am sure that the sentiment you express is felt deeply by you toward others. Are you equally sure of the disinterested friendship of others in return?" he asked, with an earnest expression of countenance and a steady gaze into her innocent face.

"O! if I doubted, I would suffer!" Janie answered, eagerly. "There is so much pleasure in my love for others that I can not mistrust a reciprocal feeling."

"I would not shake your faith, Miss Allen. Such a life is not only beautiful in itself, but beautifies other lives as well. It is the Christian spirit that has raised the standard of

the Cross, and spread round the world the benediction of Him who hallowed it with his dying agonies," he replied gently.

He was rewarded by a beautiful smile. Then he said :

"We have drifted just a little from the friend of whom we were talking. I am deeply interested in her. I think I would like to know more of her."

"She is worthy of your interest," Janie answered, unhesitatingly loyal to her love for Stella.

"Yes, true!" he said uneasily. "I mean I am interested in her as a matter of fact, not from sentiment, Miss Allen. Please don't misunderstand my meaning," he added, sensibly embarrassed.

"O!" Janie exclaimed. "But in any sense she is interesting," she said, from the impulse of her unselfish spirit.

Professor Wentworth was struggling all this time with a thought that he did not know how to express without betraying suspicions and dislikes that might sorely wound the sensitive heart of his little friend if uttered. He dreaded to awaken in her feelings that might lead to unhappiness; and yet he lingeringly desired to clear from his own mind glaring inconsistencies that made him uneasy. He longed to warn his friend against treachery, which he had once seen dimly, and which he feared had been unnoticed by the unsuspecting heart of innocence before him. He seemed to feel a sense of duty driving him on in the presence of Janie's undoubted faith in her companion; but how to do so delicately was the problem that had engaged him in a fierce mental struggle.

"I wish I could forget a part of the last day I spent at

home eight months ago," he said, meditatively. "It has lingered with me like a black spot on the sun's face. It is said that sunspots are the cause of electrical and atmospheric disturbances on our little earth. I am sure that the spot on that day's brightness caused storms to rage in my heart;" and he studied with intense gaze the mobile features before him for the effect of the allusion.

What he had said was but a hint. Had she grasped its meaning? Yes, he was certain in the very moment; for hot flushes surged over her face, and set her lip a-quivering. Her eyes sought his in a pitifully beseeching way. Then she said:

"The beautiful poet has said, like a voice from the other world, 'Let the dead past bury its dead!' Do n't let us now recall the past, especially when it would be unjust to one who has suffered deeply, and who has long since been forgiven."

Professor Wentworth sat in speechless amazement for a time in the presence of the tender, forgiving spirit before him. "Strange," he thought, "that those cruel words could be forgiven at all." And yet the appealing look and gentle plea were assuring. He was of a Christian spirit, but not so near the Master's forgiving heart, he realized, as she. He seemed gross to himself in the momentary comparison. He had never forgiven the words for the revolting impression they had then made in his parting thoughts from her. In the lonely hours of his enforced solitude he had justified the pure heart of Janie, believing that one so pure and innocent could not be a deceiving flirt; and his self-reproaches for even the entertainment of such unjust doubts for a moment, had made him, many times, unspeakably unhappy. Under the

smart of his condemnation of the guilty one he had shaped her into a repulsive character, while thus in the long interval associating them together. He was unspeakably surprised at the unexpected and intently loving companionship of the two now. He could not doubt that, more than the pure heart before him. He broke the silence at last, and said, with deep feeling:

“Your forgiving spirit is a new revelation to me. I confess that I have carried in my secret heart an oppressive weight of dislike and mistrust for your friend, Miss Allen. Would you have me now banish these impressions, and bid me think of her as I think of you? Would you have me believe that she is a pure companion, that would not again prove treacherous on occasion? Would that I could think of her without suspicion! Would that—”

But Janie could hear no more. She was suffering pain from the cruel words that were so unjust to her dear friend, who had more than atoned, by sad suffering, for all she had done under extenuating circumstances. She had not herself long reproached the penitent one; but in the fullness of her heart had forgiven all, and now pitifully clung to her as for very life itself. Why should he reproach or remain unforgiving? Her face, that she now turned towards him, was strikingly unhappy. She answered, with trembling words:

“Don’t! O, don’t be unjust to my friend, Mr. Wentworth! She does not deserve your unkind thoughts or cruel words. Believe me, that though she may have acted hastily and spoken impulsively, she is deserving of only pity now and unshaken confidence. Anything less is undeserving and cruel. She has suffered!” Janie said, with suppressed

emotions, and quivering lips, and tearful eyes, and an intently pleading look that set the sterner heart of the man in a tremor of pitying sympathy.

"O, I am cruel, and unjust, and brutal," he quickly answered, "to cause you pain. I did not intend to do that. It was the pent-up and long-suppressed indignation over what had appeared to me heartless injustice, that I had so long nursed in silence, that caused me to speak as I did. Forgive me! You will forgive, I know, when I say that I felt myself more injured and imposed upon than yourself. It was a cruel blow to my feelings—to the sentiment that had found a strange awaking that day. But if you forgive her, I can not be less generous. Now that the burden of my heart is removed by the telling of my trouble, I will banish it forever, and will never again recall its hateful presence. Your pure heart has taught me how to forgive."

"You are so good!" Janie almost cried, in the delight of her pleased heart. "I will tell you of her sufferings, and of the cruel temptations that, like a serpent's coil, were wound about her resistlessly, and by which she was made a sad victim of other's wickedness. This part of her life-history you do not know. You will pity her as it is unfolded, and forgive her, as you can not now do in ignorance of her suffering. She will appear before you in her true light then," Janie added with intense eagerness, in her desire to justify her friend and blot out all reproaches against her.

She went over the past delicately, lovingly, gently covering all defects of character, and excusing her moral weakness. She had not gone far in the story before the professor realized that every word was for the utter effacement of re-

proach, and a perfectly unselfish desire to reinstate her in his good opinion. She was wholly forgetful of self, or of the impression she would make in her loving defense. It was told at last; and with much feeling was portrayed the prostrate and disheartened wreck she had been left. She would have disguised the part she had played in her efforts to reclaim, and the steps by which she had brought her back to the pitying friendship of old associates again. But his keen insight and knowledge of human nature looked through the story, beautiful as it was in its unselfish and loving character, and saw the guiding hand that had rescued, and the forgiving heart that had whitened the stains. He had no reason now to think of the past. He would forgive, and not the faintest trace of her act of treachery should linger as a shadow in his mind. All would be blotted out for the sake of the eloquent advocate who had pleaded so sweetly and generously. She sat before him, at the end of the story, almost panting from the eager intensity of her effort, awaiting his words of reconciliation. Then he said:

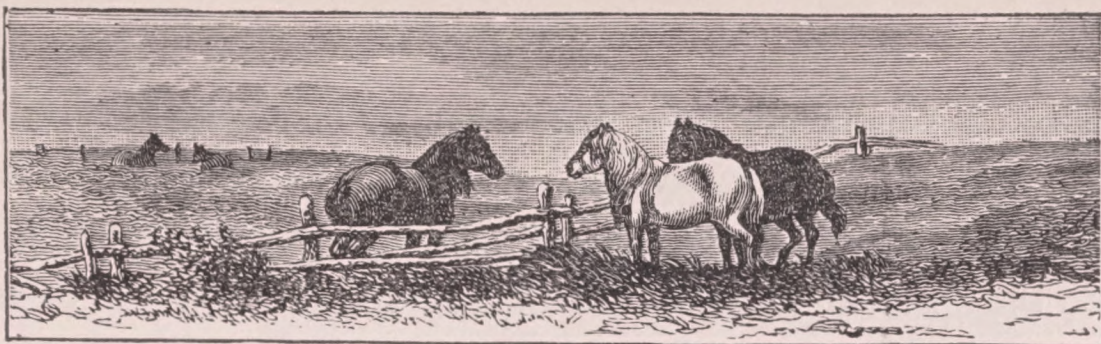
“Your plea is a beautiful one; your motives are pure as ever were the martyrs’, agonizing in their soul-sustaining convictions. You drive away every misty doubt, as the sun’s hot rays burn out the noxious vapors of quagmires. No lurking suspicions can live in the presence of your undefiled nobility of character,” he answered, as if the problem with which he had been wrestling was now clearly solved, and with perfect satisfaction to himself. “You are a noble defender,” he added. “She ought to be devoted as no friend has ever been before.”

Janie had passed through a great nervous strain in this

long talk with Professor Wentworth. He saw that she was mentally wearied, and suggested a walk through the grove as a relief and antidote against her tense feelings.

Stella, in the meanwhile, was a concealed witness from the upper porch, to the long and earnest interview. She divined that she alone could be the cause of such an anxious display of feeling on Janie's part. She did not doubt but her love would be as true now as it had been in the past of her troubles. She grew still more anxious and restless in her yearning desires. She had a task before her that thrilled her being with intense desire and eagerness of purpose. As she saw the two walk away and lose themselves in the grove, she paced the lone porch back and forth with the restless tread of a newly-caged denizen of the forest, chafing under the restraints of its iron-bound cage.





CHAPTER XVIII.

STELLA'S STRUGGLE.

JANIE and Professor Wentworth returned at the dinner-hour, and entered the dining-room together. Stella was not there, as Janie had expected. She was distressed that she was not at her side, as always before. She could not eat, and, excusing herself, went out in search of her. None could give an account of her. The meal was a tasteless one on her return, and was quickly eaten. Then she resumed the search, but finally in discouragement desisted, and went to her room. Wearied in spirit, and heavy-eyed from the vigils of the night, she laid herself on the bed, and was soon lost in the soothing oblivion of sleep.

Professor Wentworth, after the meal, sought a solitary seat beneath a group of trees off to the left of the grounds, and directly above the water that here ever restlessly swashed among the broken rocks, that were indiscriminately piled one upon another out into the water, as they had fallen from their native beds under the corroding effects of the storm-tossed waves. It was an attractive spot, and was

sheltered somewhat from intrusion. The outlook from it was beautiful. The sky and water seemed like a broad sheet of neutral tint under the sun's full glare, blending into the spectral distance of a misty horizon. He sat looking upon the beautiful vision, so softly spread out before him, lost in impressive abstraction.

Hasty footsteps aroused him, suddenly, by their abrupt approach. His quick gaze was startled by the blanched and rigid face of Stella, as she stood before him in the instant struggling to speak. He mechanically arose, and, removing his hat, addressed her kindly, and offered her a seat. But, in her agitation, she then neither spoke nor moved from her rigid position. Some deep emotion was torturing her heart in his presence, it was evident. The lingering plea of the gentle friend of the morning now came back to him; and, as his mind associated the two in the moment, he was moved by pity for her sorrows. Gently he touched her hand as if to arouse, and besought her to be seated. She sat down with folded hands buried in her dress before her, and in a husky voice, said:

"I have come to you, Mr. Wentworth, to undo a great wrong, and confess to an injustice, of which I was once guilty, against one of the best and purest spirits of earth. To right that wrong I would hesitate at no humiliation. An imp of perdition would not more wantonly and treacherously have blasted a suffering soul than I once strove to do. And yet she has forgiven me, and in her tears of pity has washed away every remembrance of evil that I would have done her. Her heart-throbs of sympathy have beaten against my wicked heart-beats, as she has taken me to her-

self in tender love. Nothing less than an angel's spirit has sheltered me from degradation and destruction."

She ceased to speak then, and, with trembling lips, clung in a silent gaze upon his face. The confession was made so impressively and suddenly that he had not sufficient composure to reply intelligently. To gain a moment's time, in which to pacify her, he said, in deepest thoughtfulness:

"I am bewildered, Mrs. Ludlow."

"Are you not conscious, Professor Wentworth, of the meaning of my words?" she asked, in distress, as the sudden thought flashed upon her mind that she was incoherent.

"Yes; I know your meaning."

"Then you hate me too much to reply. I could not expect you to forgive me. I am unworthy of it. It is for *her* sake that I plead—not my own. My cruel words were unjust to her. They were spoken in hateful jealousy and cruel malice, and were intended, in my wicked heart, to injure her. Believe this! It is all I ask of you! I crave nothing for my own sake," she cried, in desperation, and with an agonizing look that could not have been more touching upon the face of one at the stake.

"Mrs. Ludlow," answered the professor, now under the deepest embarrassment, "you are unjust to yourself."

"No, no!" she cried. "How pitifully our sins always find us out at last!" she moaned. "My poor heart writhes in suffering for my sins now. It is only such as Janie who can not know cruel suffering in this world."

"Your friend is not unjust to you, Mrs. Ludlow. I pray you, let me soothe with that assurance!" he said, to quiet her self-reproaches.

"O, I know that!" she answered, impetuously. "She could not be unjust to any one. She does not think ill of me, and for that I feel the sting of my own conscience. She will not reproach you either, if my treacherous words have found lodgment in your heart to impress you wrongly against her. No, she can reproach no one! But I am not striving now with such thoughts. I want that you should know I spoke falsely against my friend; and, if you have entertained a doubt against her because of my words, that you banish them, now and forever, as being wholly untrue. Nothing less than this will satisfy me."

"Then you may be satisfied," answered the professor, with an assuring smile.

"Would you thus say that you were not hurt by my cruel words?"

"O no, not that!"

"You must have been deeply wounded; for I could see it then by the change in your looks," she said, sorrowfully.

"Yes, Mrs. Ludlow—deeply wounded. I could not then fathom the meaning of your words, and did not dream that any one could thus strive to injure another. I carried the hurt with me to distant lands; and it was among the solitudes of the Ural wastes that my heart threw off its reproaches at last, and clung to its faith in the purity of her lovely nature, as it had appeared in the brief acquaintance of but a few hours. Not she, but another, I was assured, was untrue to Christian instincts," he said, sadly. "I met her again last evening, after my long absence, with that pure thought in my heart. I could not think of her now in

any other light. You may consider my words harsh, but it is the truth you seek, I am assured."

"Your words are not harsh, but are full of tenderness and consolation to my suffering senses. Go on, I pray you!"

"As I would shelter her gentle nature from harrowing reproaches, so I would now refrain from wounding your feelings."

"I am sure of that; but you can not hurt me. Reproaches from your lips are like welcome music to the soul; for they refresh me, and are deserving. If they but have the notes of tenderness for her, they are then sweeter than all else to me."

"If I have spoken harshly, it is not to wound; but to assure you that your self-accusations and apprehensions for Janie's sake are now beyond the reach of consideration. I thus hastened to cut deep into the abscess, to stop its throbbing pain by speaking plainly. Should I strive to make you think I did not suffer, it would be to trifle with the subject and deceive you. With the knowledge that I did suffer, the assurance to you, who now suffer most of all, that Miss Allen is unspeakably near to me, will be most satisfying and most pleasing."

For the first time a lovely smile broke through the dark clouds of suffering that had rested on Stella's face, and she was beautiful in the gleam.

"I am beginning to feel the touch of happiness again," she exclaimed. "My heart is lighter now than since you came to our retreat."

"So is mine," he answered, significantly.

"O that I could do justice to my sweet friend!" Stella cried as if she had not already said enough. "I could neither eat nor sleep until the wrong I had done her was righted, even though you should hate me. Your hate and contempt and reproaches would have cheered my heart, if only you could be made to think of the innocent one in her true light. She is an angel of purity, and is as unconscious of self as the warm sunrays in their life-giving influences."

Professor Wentworth had been impressed by the morning defense of the one, that evil might be condoned; and now he was still more deeply impressed by the love of the other, who would spare herself nothing that justice should be done. An exalted respect for womankind came to him in the realization. His heart went out towards both in glad approval; and with such a sentiment moving him, he said to Stella, with feeling:

"Lakeside will henceforth be an oasis in my life. Before coming here I was never given so gladdening a view of woman's lovely nature moved by Christian impulses. I am glad I came, and will go hence happier than when I came. I have much to thank you for, Mrs. Ludlow."

Then Stella sweetly said:

"And while I have been just to my friend, can I hope for your forgiveness? It is too much to ask for, I know; for the blackness of my character must be sadly repulsive to you. Do no injustice to Janie, however! That is all I can ask or desire," she added, with a pitiful look.

"Let me tell you something, Mrs. Ludlow. Your little friend made a most beautiful plea this morning in your defense. From her standpoint you did nothing from your own

impulses, but was moved by an evil spirit that had controlled you. She told me of your old friendship for each other, of its severance, of your sorrows, of your reunion, of her deep love for you. She pleaded for you, as you have been doing for her, that reproaches might not rest upon you. She made you appear as a victim that has risen from the bondage of chains to the beauty of a heroine. Not more clearly does the mirror of the water, lying out there, reflect the beautiful sun's face now than my heart its perfect respect for both of you. And let me venture to say just a little more: the sun does not more intensely shed its heat from the clear sky than my heart its glow of warmth for that lovely little woman you have so generously defended. You can not ask me, then, if I forgive you. There is nothing to forgive. Instead, it is in my heart to thank you for the subtle joy that is strangely new to it. I am largely in your debt."

Stella was overjoyed, and sat silently reveling in the unspeakable pleasure she now felt in contrast to the deep sorrow and wild torturings that had found birth in her room the night before. She sat and wept tears of joy. She felt in her heart that she had at last atoned for her evil acts; that she had paid back a part of her debt; that she could thus prove to the dear one the sincerity of her intense love.

Janie awaked at last from sleep, refreshed and strengthened, and, with thought of Stella, started out again in search of her. With beautiful face she mingled among her friends inquiringly, and wandered in a lonely way about the porches, then out over the outspreading lawn among the benches and chairs filled with guests enjoying the gentle breeze that blew from the lake, and answered back to many a pleasant word

of recognition. She had almost reached the little clump of trees that hid her friends from view before discovering them. They were intently absorbed in pleasing conversation. The hot blood rushed to her face at the sight. Was it for this that Stella had evaded her throughout the day? What could it mean? O no! Her gentle heart reproached her that a doubt should now arise. "The meeting could not have been planned in her absence," she cried to herself. "It could be but a natural one, and the absorbing interest only what could be expected." She was happy, even thus, to find her friend, though she—he—saw her not now. She hesitated a moment, and thought to turn away. But that would look as if she mistrusted her friend, and her heart smote her again for the suspicion. Instead, she walked quietly toward them, and hailed Stella a little way off.

"Ah, Stella!" she cried, "I have at last found you!"

Stella and Professor Wentworth arose together, and she caught Janie in her arms with such fervent pressure, and with such a shower of smothering kisses, that she was bewildered.

"Yes," Stella answered, "you have found me. I confess I have been in hiding from you all the day. Professor Wentworth will tell you why," she said, with an open, frank look that disarmed Janie's doubts, and banished every hesitating thought in the instant.

The professor then took Janie's hand as if he had not met her before during the day, and his look was so deeply searching, and the pressure so warm and ardent, that her heart was set into a thrill of stormy beating at once.

"She has told me more of herself than you did this morning, Miss Allen. What you would have hid, she tore the

mask away from, and has been pleading for your sake," he said, eagerly.

Then the sudden thought came like a flash to Janie's mind that Stella had been wrestling during the night and day with the resolve to expose herself, and, in the light of truth, to clear her of the reproaches that she feared were lurking in his mind. Stella was beautiful to her in the instant, and in a speechless way she now returned her affectionate embraces. To the curious eyes about, their loving demonstrations were because of their discovery of each other. None could know the deep emotions in which the three were looking into each other's hearts now, in which purity and sincerity were undisguised.

"O, you cruel little woman, that you should, by your desertion of me, have made me so lonely and distressed all the day! Where have you been all the time?" said Janie, with feigned reproach.

"Indeed I have had a hard enough time in evading you. I had a cruel task to perform that justice required of me. I would never have known another happy moment had I shrunk from undoing the foul wrong I had once done you, Janie. The only opportunity that might ever be offered now demanded it. To have told you what was in my heart would have been to defeat my firm resolve. You would not have suffered me to clear the stain I had made upon your character. You would have borne it, as you have always done, that I might be sheltered from humiliation. No! I knew your tender heart too well to take you into my secret. It was a task that I must perform, and could not be denied. Professor Wentworth can say if I spared myself in my

effort to clear you of the taint that does not belong to you."

"She was not less noble in her defense of you, Miss Allen, than you were of her this morning; and that is saying very much—much more than so many words imply."

"And that was the sorrow you carried to your Maker last night?" said Janie; "for you have kept nothing from me heretofore."

"Yes, it was that. I asked for strength to do my duty. When Professor Wentworth said, last night, that he could not remain longer than the Sabbath, I suddenly realized that but little time was left me in which to atone for the past. The intensely eager desire to be true to you, then racked me with nervous agitation; and I am scarcely recovered from it now."

"Poor little woman!" answered Janie. "You have strangely agitated me during the past hours; but you have now cleared away all fears, and demonstrated a loveliness of character that I have always thought belonged to you justly. You are dearer than ever to me in the proving, if that be possible."

The sun was slowly approaching the western horizon now. Perhaps two hours more of the daylight, and twilight would remain, in which to paint its lovely colors upon the sky and water. Already it was spreading its soft, golden tints upon the misty islands in the distance, and scattering broad bands of yellow upon the still, mirror-like lake. It was an ethereal splendor, wherein the great disk wrought its changing beauties. Softly, tenderly, the colors blended and shifted, and merged again into single hues that were

more beautiful upon the water, in soft reflections, than upon the heavens.

Slowly the sun sank behind towering masses of clouds, that were silvered over, or bathed in metallic bronze, or inflamed with an ominous red, that merged into blackness in the lower strata, suggestive of gathering storms. The little row-boats that crept over the lake looked as if gliding, with their happy burdens, through molten colors, stretching unbroken from shore to distant islands. It was a lovely sight—a sight granted, seemingly, to certain spots only of the beautiful earth. In the presence of the impressive effects of the color-play, its loveliness seemed to pass from the beautiful face of nature to their hearts, and became as a finishing touch to banish their disturbing thoughts.





CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE ISLANDS.

IT was a hot, breezeless night and an oppressive morning that followed the gorgeous color-changes of the evening before. There seemed to be no grateful breath in the air, either to fan the perspiring face or ripple the motionless water of the lake. A misty dimness drew the horizon close about the sleeping islands, and hid their wooded heights behind a veil. The sky was gorgeous throughout the day with great, detached cloud-masses, that hung motionless and beautiful in fantastic shapes. Occasionally, as the afternoon wore on, some black cumulus mass would send out an echoing note of thunder from the northern sky, and then drift away mysteriously into the vanishing distance. The oppressive heat grew in intensity with the day, and an ominous silence clung to the face of nature.

At six o'clock in the evening all the western sky was black about the horizon, with skurrying white masses drifting hither and thither across its forbidding face. The blackness climbed higher and higher into the heavens, with white,

vivid streaks of lightning dashing athwart its blackness earthward, followed by distant, rumbling thunder, that seemed to echo and re-echo among the clouds. With a spectral white line across the shadowy water, that crept swiftly nearer and nearer, came the strange rumble of a distant noise, that grew momentarily louder and louder. Then, in an instant, great trees sank prostrate beneath the resistless fury of the tempest; and chairs and benches started of themselves into a mad race across the lawn; and the waters of the lake swept over the dock and gate-house, torn into foam and shreds; and blinding torrents of rain dashed in sheets past the trembling guests, huddled upon the east porch in dread suspense and awe of the danger and grandeur of the storm.

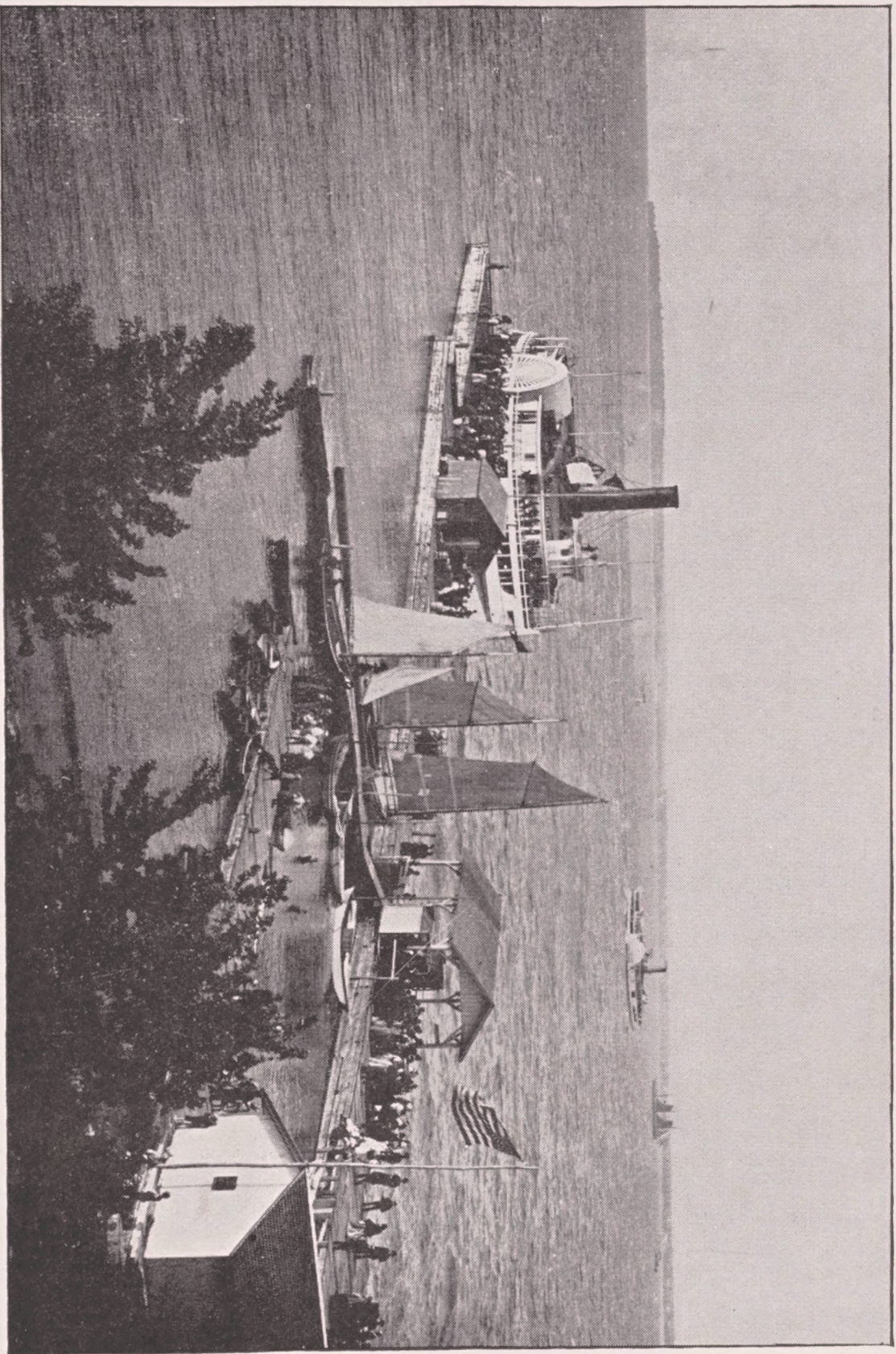
Here Janie and Stella and Professor Wentworth stood on chairs together, looking over the heads of the trembling crowd into the awful presence of nature, moved rather by a sense of wondrous fascination than dread or fear. Though wet by the dashing rain, they clung to the view until the wind had passed, and only the disturbed and restless waves breaking over the dock, and rolling thunder reverberating through the distant heavens, remained. Until late into the night a strange, lurid tint clung to the western sky and water, and lent a weird effect to the night.

But upon the morn every trace of the storm had vanished from the face of nature, and again the beautiful sunlight was gilding the dancing leaves and miniature waves that tossed, whitecapped, in the water of the lake. A cool breeze steadily blew from the west, that chilled the air and made light wraps comfortable. On rising in the early morn,

all faced the sunlight, and inhaled the refreshing coolness into the lungs as a welcome invigorator and preparative for the breakfast. There were many happy hearts and cheerful faces that clear Saturday morning, and the happiest were Janie and Stella. No trace of the tempest that had raged in their hearts remained now to sadden their brows; and they were refreshed, as beautiful nature after her storm and life-giving rain. The nerve torture, the heart pains, the exciting emotions, the mental distress that had lingered but a little while before, had all vanished now, as the heat had vanished.

An excursion among the islands had been arranged for the day, and the little steamer was now lying at the dock, tossing and chafing at its fastenings. The company was composed of congenial spirits from the hotel and cottages. At nine o'clock the little boat had received its cargo, and, amid the cheers and loving wishes of friends upon the dock, they started upon their round of pleasure. At Catawba they spent an hour rambling upon its pretty beach, gathering shells. At Green Island they loitered beneath forest-trees, whose leaves had made a soft bed for the treading feet; or gathered specimens of crystal gypsum; or inspected the lighthouse; or played croquet on the smooth government lawn overlooking the lake.

Then, at the noonday hour, they spread cloths on the grass of Rattlesnake Island, beneath the shade of an orchard, and ate their lunch in the open air, fanned by a cooling breeze. Here they lingered long in happy companionship. Then, after making the circuit of the island, they steered for Middle Bass. The island was green with vineyards laden with clustering bunches of grapes, that later on would fill the



“The little steamer was now lying at the dock, tossing and chafing at its fastenings.”

—Page 218.



wine-presses, and in little baskets gladden the markets of myriad cities. Steamers came and went, and pretty little yachts skimmed the water, and an air of life and happiness dwelt, that made them loath at last to leave the place. Briefly they tarried at Put-in-Bay, where an impression of drunken revelry lingered about the groves and streets, everywhere defiled by brazen signs of intoxicants for sale.

The afternoon was drawing rapidly to a close when the landing at Ballast was made. On its further side, upon the flat rocks of a miniature grotto, paved at its base by a bed of white, rounded stones, that the waves had piled there, they were to be grouped together for a picture, the lake as a background. Many had grown weary with the long day's incessant changes; and, after the walk across the island, were glad to rest and linger in silence beneath the shade of forest-trees that overspread the romantic spot.

For the most part, our three friends had been together during all the day. They were now sitting on the trunk of a decaying tree, quietly looking at the preparations being made for the picture on the rocks beneath. Janie arose from beside her friends and stepped to the edge of the little cliff, attracted by a purple flower that was almost hid among the weeds. She was lost, in the interest for the new flower, to the further acts of her companions. She had secured one of the coveted flowers; but farther down, another stock was seen more perfect in character. Taking hold of a slender, projecting branch of a tree for support, she leaned far over to reach it. The branch broke as she bore her weight upon it, and in an instant she was precipitated to the bottom, bruised and stunned.

With a feeling of horror, Professor Wentworth sprang to the edge and down the ragged rocks, and stood over her in speechless pity. He gently lifted her limp form in his strong arms, and swiftly climbed the jagged rocks, and bore her through the excited groups to a cottage near at hand, and tenderly laid her upon a lounge, still unconscious. Never for a moment did his intense gaze leave her death-like face as he carried her helpless before him. In the suspense of his heart a sudden thought came, with the force of a blow, that thrilled his strong manhood and made his frame tremble. Until her eyes opened again to look into his glad face, the thought repeated itself with growing pain, "I can not do without her! I can not do without her!"

She at last responded to their efforts of resuscitation, and life came back with a bewitching smile in answer to his tender words and the proffered flower, which he had snatched from the rocks as he had gathered her to his arms. As she now lay silent and languid, she read from his acts the secret his lips had not spoken as yet. A few cruel bruises looked from her forehead and face in purple tints, and she was sore in body, though not badly hurt. At last, with firm resolution, she arose, and taking the arm of the professor on one hand, and that of Stella on the other, slowly returned to the little boat.

The day's wanderings were over, and the prow of the boat was turned homeward, the shades of evening closing about them. The only mishap of the day was this painful one; but through its pain came an awaking ecstasy of joy to the hearts of Stella and the professor.

An accident, or sudden sickness, or precipitated calamity,

many times reveal the true love in which one is held by friends. Unsuspected before, the revelation is surprising as well as pleasing. Janie had not dreamed that she was endeared to all; or that her fair nature and lovely character had been the theme of praises, that had not reached her ears till now.

In the unguarded moments of sympathizing impulses, much was said to her that, at other times, could not have been uttered. They made her heart beat fast and furiously; and it was only when the door of her room had closed, and she and Stella were left alone, that she gave way to the tumult of her emotions. And Stella clung to her with tender joy as they recalled, together, the delicate words and acts of all.

She lay on the edge of her bed, and Stella sat beside her stroking her little hand, as had become a habit when alone together. At intervals she gently bathed her bruises with an arnica lotion, and soothed by the graceful caresses that only a woman can know. The twilight thickened into the darkness of night, when a gentle knock at the door divided their attentions, and a note was handed to Stella. It was from Professor Wentworth, asking after the little invalid in a tenderly sympathetic way.

An answer was returned by Janie, couched in thankfulness for the remembrance, concluding with assurances that the night would restore, and the morning find her again as usual.

Stella lit the light and turned it low, so that only a mellow glow lingered in the shadows about the room. Then she busied herself, for a time, in arranging their night-robes and preparing for the rest Janie so much required. Delicately she assisted her friend, and at last saw her quietly lying between the covers in a restful way. They were alone

in the dim light, with new and strange cravings tossing through their minds. Stella had again, now that all had been done, taken her place beside Janie, holding her hand in her own as before. Then, in anxious solicitude, she asked:

"You are perfectly comfortable now, dear?"

"Yes, Stella," Janie answered, with a smile. "Pray do no more. I know you must be tired."

"And are you sure there is no pain, dear?"

"Only a slight soreness—that is all. It will be well by to-morrow. Do n't think of it again."

Then Stella drew her little hand to her lips, and kissed it tenderly.

"O, I am so glad," she exclaimed, "that everything ended as it did to-day, Janie! It would not be wicked to say that it was providential, I hope; but I feel it that way somehow."

"You speak strangely, Stella," answered Janie, quickly, earnestly looking into her face. "I do think it providential that I was not seriously injured; and for that I am grateful to the kind Master, who has ever guarded me."

"And in still another sense I think it providential, and am glad it happened! Do n't think by that I am glad you were hurt. I am sorry," and she kissed her soft face nestling in the pillow at her side, in attestation of the assurance.

Janie lay silently, dreamily listening to her rambling words. Then she heard Stella say:

"You were dead to all about you, and could know nothing of the devouring look of pain and suffering fastened upon you as you were borne from the spot. But other eyes saw the plainly written sentiment there that I did; and for that, I say the fall was providential."

Stella craved to hear a single word from Janie's lips in reply; but she still lay silently thinking.

"I know something of the world," she continued, "and can read deeply the looks of men. Your unsuspecting heart and delicate nature can know best the perfume and lovely tints and varied forms of flowers that lift your thoughts to the untainted beauties of heavenly things. You may live in the atmosphere of pure love unsuspectingly—if the words be not whispered directly into your ears," she added.

A gentle pressure of Stella's hand, a confiding look, and a sunny smile were the silent answers to her words of praise.

Stella paced the floor a moment, and then returned to Janie's side, with a look of unsuppressed eagerness.

"I am so restless," she said, with nervous movements. "My heart cravings seem almost within reach. Too soon would I realize the happiness of which I have been dreaming. I can not wait! I must see your fair brow crowned with a diadem of orange-blossoms, or my heart will never cease its mad tumult."

Janie reached out and wound her white arm about Stella's neck, and drew her face close to her own, until the two faces nestled in the same pillow, touching each other.

"Let me close your lips, Stella—thus," Janie whispered, as she placed a little hand over Stella's mouth gently.

But through the light barrier of her soft prison-bars, Stella laughingly continued:

"Your true, honest, just, loving heart, leaning only to things that are beautiful and of good report, must turn at last to the loadstone of another pure heart, and lose itself in nature's best estate."

But, before Stella had concluded the sentence, Janie's soft hand had lifted from the lips, and was patting her cheek instead, that fairly glowed in the dim shadow of the lamp-light.

"I do not know what to think of your words, Stella. They bring thoughts that are new to me," she dreamily answered.

"They are thoughts that have found an awaking in my heart, as your gentle love permeated my grosser nature and lifted me from degradation. I saw, on that cold afternoon of winter, the love looking from that manly face. You did not see it; but it aroused a demon in my heart then, and my lips uttered its promptings. I thought that the foul work had been done then; but an overruling Providence interposed, and defeated my cruel heartlessness. Now I am glad."

Stella had risen from the bed; and now, sitting rigidly straight and with the look of sadness that had lingered about her days of deepest sorrow, quickly said:

"But I must not bring up the past again. Its ugly face was exorcised long since by your magic of love. It is only to recall the knowledge of his love, that looks from out a dismal past to the happy present, that I refer to it. As I once would have torn that love away from you, now I strive with an unspeakable yearning that it may be bound to you. Its presence is a joy to my heart. Its attainment will be the crowning glory of my sin-burdened life. Your happy state will not be like mine, that was abased and made to drink deep the dregs of reproach."

Then Janie, looking sadly into Stella's face, said, with a voice of pity:

"I wish there were no sin in the world, Stella. Then there would be no heartaches and misery."

"The contrast of our lives proves that truth. It is a truth that applies to all other lives as well. God help us to do right!" Stella exclaimed, as if tortured by an avenging presence. It was a cry of the soul that had suffered from the effects of sin, and that had awaked to the better state of a Christian life, guided by Christian impulses.

"Come, Stella," Janie now urged, "if you do not turn your thoughts into another channel, the day will end in sorrow to me."

With such an assurance, Stella threw off the sorrowful reflections that somehow had irresistibly drifted into their happiness. Then she seemed to relax from the tense attitude and rigid features of the past few moments, and the old, loving ways came back instead. She said, taking Janie's hand:

"Let me be your soothsayer to-night, Janie. Let us, for the effect, imagine ourselves in the dim light and faint shadows that linger about us in an isolated cave. I am arrayed in a strange costume; my black tresses are hanging about my waist; an unearthly light gleams from my eyes. Here is your little palm in my hard and bony hand. Just a moment. O, I see! This line is happiness, made strong by these little lines of good acts and tender love that run so abundantly into it. And here is great riches; but that will have no effect upon your generous nature—the poor and the suffering will be the better for that. Here is worldly praise;

and strange, it will not touch the heart, for these lines of good desires outweigh human praise. O! here I must stop, and study awhile! You are—yes—you are to be wedded; and the lines foretell that it will be before the year ends. He will be a distinguished man; one of great accomplishments, and learned in travel. He will love you with the great heart of a lovely and loyal nature. Your life to the end—yes, the lines indicate to the end—will be purest happiness.”

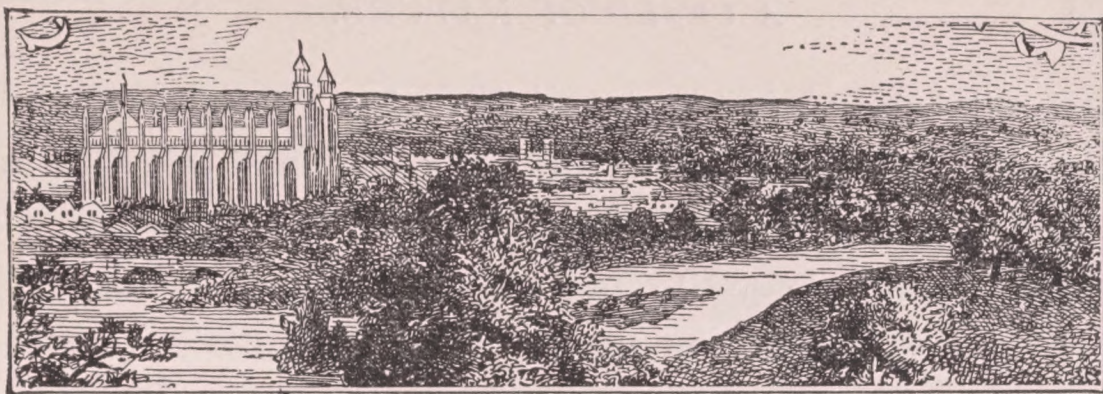
“O, Stella!” Janie strove to interrupt, but Stella softly chided, and declared that interruption would break the spell of divination. “You are a good fortune-teller, I know; but I fear you borrow much from heart desires. I think I am satisfied with your good wishes now, Stella,” Janie said, with misty eyes.

“All right, dear; but my light words will be recalled after a while. I will add to the prediction now, that you will not then forget your dear friend, though your heart will be sapped by the strong tendrils of a deep affection for another.”

It was a lovely smile that gleamed from the pillow upon Stella’s intent face.

Then Stella arose and kissed Janie’s lips, and with her dainty fingers pulled down the lids of her eyes, and bade her be still and sleep.

Soon both lay motionless in the darkness—not sleeping—but thinking. Stella’s restless heart-cravings kept her awake long after the heavy breathing of Janie indicated that she had drifted away into the land of dreams.



CHAPTER XX.

THE SABBATH.

IT was the Sabbath, and an undisturbed quiet rested upon the beautiful morning. Shut out from the world by the closed gates, the day was set apart for meditation and Christian service. The bell, calling to six o'clock prayer at the auditorium, was the only sound to break the morning stillness. Even the chattering birds, bathing in sunlight, seemed to feel the silent impress; and the placid lake lay unruffled by a wavelet, stretching beyond the vision as a gleaming light. No games, or hilarious laughter, or wild romp of children, or screaming whistles, or puffing boats could be heard. All was peaceful, restful. Even before the opening of their window-shutters to the full sunlight, the quiet of the day was felt by Janie and Stella; and their hearts lifted in reverence to the God whose presence seemed to linger about them in the placid beauty of the morning.

At the foot of the steps, as the two descended slowly to a late breakfast, they were met by the cheerful greeting of Professor Wentworth. Janie's reassuring words made his

face still brighter; and the pink of her cheeks turned to crimson in the light of his undisguised happiness. He sat beside Janie at the breakfast-table. It was his last day of loitering pleasure; for in the early morning he would take up his journey again for the far West. His desire to spend as much of the day with his friend as possible could not be denied. Nor was he sparing of tender words, as he recalled the days' adventures. While thus lingering by the open window, through which poured the bright morning sunlight, laden with the chatter of birds, the placid restfulness of the day filled their hearts with a subdued and undefined pleasure.

Janie could not attend the morning service. She had looked forward to the satisfaction of hearing one whose lectures had delighted her; but was now consoled in disappointment by Stella and the professor, who would not leave her alone. As the quickened steps of the anxious throng hastened to the auditorium, the three sought the shelter of their favorite tree, overlooking the lake. From thence their eyes wandered out over the broad expanse of motionless water, broken, in the distance, by the wooded islands lying like sleeping giants in misty haze. There was a beautiful play of light and shade upon the surface of the water, resembling mysterious movements of unseen agents. Miles away the gentle puffs of passing zephyrs would ruffle the surface into shadowy ripples. They would dance and sparkle in the near view, until the expiring breath of the zephyr would smooth the water again into glassy brightness. Their receptive hearts were delighted with the gentle play of sunlight, soft puffs of air, and the quiet lake that gave all back in reflected beauty.

In a tender way, Janie at length broke the silence that had drawn their delighted senses to the beauties of the scene. She said:

"The hand that could transfer to the canvas the magic effects of sunlight and shadow, the soft tints of sky and water, and impress the quiet peacefulness of the morning there, would be immortal. I am glad that the heart is so sensitized as to receive the impress, and that we can feel the thrill of the emotions it inspires in the mystery of our strange organization. Thus we are lifted above material surroundings, and presented face to face with the spirit that pervades it. I am glad," she said, with deep feeling, "that I can believe that there is a loving God looking through the beauties of nature into our hearts, whose presence we can feel."

"A child of nature," Professor Wentworth replied admiringly, "that can, in her sensitive heart, respond to the touch of nature's beauties, as the glowing flower does to the sunlight; and look into the face of the Creator with purity, as the flower looks into our enraptured gaze,—can best feel and know the Divine presence. We might all feel as you do, were our thoughts and desires turned heavenward instead of earthward. Would that we were all children of nature alike in feeling God's presence in the heart, instead of torturing the reason in vain efforts to banish his presence from creation! The beauties that touch and enthrall are only beautiful as the great Personal Presence of beauty and purity, that has given them being, is recognized. Otherwise all is dumb chaos; and the changing seasons, and the mystery of life, and the wonders of nature, and the thought and energy

in the laws of nature are meaningless. The approving conscience, that thrills with delight in good deeds, or that is tortured with smiting reproaches in evil, would be but mockery."

"That is only too true," responded Stella, with emotion. "My life is a living witness of its truth. It is only since recognizing God's presence in my life that I have felt a satisfying happiness, and that because no smittings of conscience now hurt me. Experience has taught me the blessedness of a good life, and I do not shrink from the confession."

Professor Wentworth suffered pain from Stella's impulsive testimony. He feared that his words had wrung the confession from her, perhaps with heartaches. With emotion he exclaimed:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Ludlow, if I have said anything to drag your past into our thoughts. It was but the contrast which one fact presented to another that arose to mind."

"But I am not hurt by the allusion," Stella quickly replied. "Rather I am glad, even by my own life-experience, to verify your words. I can exult in the truth, which I know has changed my life for the better, as it did for poor Mary Magdalene."

"Thank you! I am so glad I did not wound your feelings!" the professor answered, the look of trouble passing from his face. "Our personal experiences do more than all the scientific conjectures of time to disclose the beautiful harmony of life guided by moral restraints. Can this great principle be meaningless? Why should we feel approved or condemned by our acts? What has quickened the conscience but the moral laws resting upon it? Or, why a conscience, if not to admonish of a responsibility to a Law-

maker out and beyond ourselves? Not one life, but all human history has testified that moral laws are necessary for happiness, and that their violation has brought sin and misery upon humanity. How came such moral laws to be associated with human destiny? Could they have originated of themselves? Or, is it not more in reason that a Great Heart of purity, beating in sympathy with humanity, has established them? Their presence can not be denied any more than physical laws. Reason rests upon all, like a benediction, to bless."

Then the professor paused in silent thoughtfulness, while Janie's surprised look clung to his face with a lingering smile.

"Tell me!" she said. "It is so unusual to find a man of science *en rapport* with the belief of a creative mind in nature, that I long to know how it is you happen to believe what others seem to doubt."

"Possibly one reason, in answer, is, that I no longer think of myself in relation to the mysteries of science. At one time I felt it was a duty of the scientist to explain every mystery. It finally came to me with force that our hypotheses were not explanations; that our theories vanished with a little cleaner light or a discovery of a new fact. I assumed, at first, that science was able to account, in a materialistic way, for every fact; but, while struggling with such a presumption, the presence of wisdom and plan and purpose in nature everywhere stood in my way. I could not get behind this specter that bewilders every investigator. I struggled with it until my reason was exhausted, and cried that thought was but the reflection of a thinker. Realizing that our knowledge, at best, is confined superficially to a

few facts only, and they simply to the operations of law, and that no fact in our possession can establish an ultimate truth, I felt the littleness of human pretensions and the vanity of vapory hypotheses. Then the light began to break upon the mystery around me. The plan and purpose of laws governing every operation of nature had a new meaning. The harmonious movements of great systems of worlds; the wondrous plan of creation, following definite and unalterable lines of development; the incomprehensible mystery of human reason and aspirations, assumed a beautiful naturalness, under the operations of a Creative Mind, that the material substance could not give. When my mind at last took firm hold of this belief, I was happy in the glorified beauties that everywhere confronted me, touched by the presence of Divinity. The whole created universe assumed a new beauty that impressed with a reverential feeling, and irresistibly pointed to a personal accountability to a moral Lawgiver. Now, all this you have doubtless reached by intuition, Miss Allen. With me, it was by a slow process of reasoning, and by a desperate conflict with the scientific methods, into whose skeptical meshes I had become ensnared. I am glad," the professor said, with earnest emphasis, "that I no longer seek for the improbable among the atoms of matter; but that reason and human impulse are free to recognize the Creative Mind in nature."

But Janie's mind was not thus logical. Her conclusions had been reached in a simpler way. It was the dictation of a gentle and keenly sensitive nature, that grasped conviction through the channel of sentiment, a way open to every organization.

“The spiritual presence can be *felt*, as well as seen,” she answered. “My faith is a simple one. Lovingly we peruse and re-peruse the letters of absent friends, and we know the handwriting and tender heart-dictation that looks from the page. Lovingly we can peruse the silent words written upon the sky, in the face of nature, in beautiful flowers, in strange emotions, and in the complex structures enshrining the mystery of life; and the handwriting looks from the pages so tenderly that the heart can not deny. We know that reason and thought and tenderness and love are written over all creation. We can not doubt that Spiritual Presence more than the presence of the friend whose letter we so lovingly peruse.”

To which the professor replied:

“With the vision of a Spiritual Presence, to which you so tenderly allude, the edifice of science is transformed; and nature and the world become a shrine, broken into naves and transepts and chapels, with the starry firmament its roof, and the birds its choristers. It is then that reason and the heart combine to exalt our hopes; and science shifts the scenes, that glimpses of the Creator’s presence can be recognized.”

Stella could no longer remain silent. Taking Janie’s hand in her own, as if to soften the effect of her words, she said:

“I used to ridicule, in my secret heart, the emotions of our little friend, as she would many times lose herself in the presence of nature, while walking together along the country lanes. I thought her childish, and sometimes roughly called her by the names of flowers, meaning to ridicule her moods.

I did not think then how closely her heart beat against the great heart that dwells in nature, and that, in her innocence, made her in fact a tender child of nature. I was of too coarse a mold to feel as she felt. But her gentle nature lovingly opened the windows of my soul to the beautiful presence of all she saw in her delicate refinement. Even I—I who am rough—have been softened by her love and gentleness: which seemed to touch me as the bright sun-rays laden with warmth touches the frozen glacier to melt it. She has made me to see the presence of God's face in nature as certainly as I have felt the smitings of his disapprobation in my heart."

Then, drawing her friend still closer to her, she continued:

"You see, Janie, I do not speak to wound your feelings, but to be just to you. I tremble with the thought now, that had you been unkind to me in my sore affliction, or turned away from me in scorn—as I had expected you to do—I would not be here now to listen to the encouraging words you both have spoken; I fear that I should have been in the grave, or, worse than that, in degradation. As your gentle will has entered into my life to transform it, so I feel that the great Divine will, somehow, enters into our hearts to prepare them for a glorified hereafter."

"While you thus so gently acknowledge the influence of your dear friend, Mrs. Ludlow," answered the professor, "I am delighted with the word-adornment of your thoughts. You refer to a will in nature, tenderly. It seems to me that, if there is a will, it must be Divine will; for matter can not have a will. We see that sins are punished by moral

laws, and that happiness follows obedience to those laws, and are therefore subject to that will. These facts seem to prove themselves. A great purpose seems to look through this responsibility, and points all human hopes to the way of happiness here, and for hereafter. The whole design of creation opens up to us in beauty and comfort, if only we will become emancipated from the thought of a Godless nature. With that Presence, we can look upon the operations of every law as we look upon a piece of machinery, knowing that a thinker is back of it. And then, not a beauty lingering upon the clear face of nature but prefigures the purity and divinity back of it; and not a yearning hope that pervades human sorrows or sufferings but is anchored in the purpose for which moral laws were designed. Life is worth living with such assurances; and the strife, with which we have to contend against sin and temptation, prepares us for the fruits of victory at last."

Almost within hearing, the songs of praise ascended from the auditorium to the God of whom our friends had been talking. The words of wisdom there uttered, proclaiming his love and the beauty of holiness, did not carry greater force to the hearts of its hundreds of auditors than the simple reflections to the three friends sitting here beneath the shade of a tree, looking into the impressive face of beautiful nature.

This serene day ended, as it began, in beauty. Only the setting sun seemed to outrival all its other efforts of color effects, to crown its loveliness like a benediction from the spirit to which the day had been dedicated.

But every joy must have an end. The end came in sad-

ness to our friends when the parting moments arrived. When but a few remained in the hall later in the night, the professor offered his last adieu. He was to leave so early in the morning that Janie and Stella could not be expected to be astir. As Janie's hand, as once before, lingered in the grip of his palm, he said :

"I have but one request to ask, after the pleasures of the past few days. My happiness has seemed to be but the continuance of that night when we were together in the city long months ago—there is scarce an interval between. A break will occur again now. May I efface this interval also by renewing our friendship when I shall have returned to Cincinnati? I will look forward to it, with your permission," he concluded, with a lingering gaze of tenderness.

Janie's confiding look, that dwelt in his thoughts with unspeakable pleasure long after, assured him that his request was granted.





CHAPTER XXI.

AT HOME.

LAKESIDE, and its burden of strange experiences and unlooked-for awakenings, had become the treasures now of memory. It was late September again, and its cool evenings were suggestive of approaching winter. Janie and Stella were in daily happy intercourse at their home, as of old. Life had been purged of its past sorrows, and no lingering reproaches remained to disturb its serenity. The white shaft stood in the hillside cemetery, touched by the silvery gleam of the soft moonlight; and, in a lonely way, it marked the resting-place of the sad wreck beneath. It had lost its power, though, to touch the hearts of those who once had sorrowed in its presence. The poor mother and wayward son lay side by side, and the single shaft was all that remained to dimly recall the past—the form and the life had almost faded from the memory.

One afternoon of this beautiful month, Stella and Janie were sitting together on the porch of the Allen's. Down the street, in a cloud of dust, was seen an approaching carriage, that both instantly recognized did not belong to the

village. The high-stepping horses and brilliant equipage came swiftly on from the distance. Then it slowed, and stopped before their gate, and Janie's eyes grew suddenly blurred, and her heart beat in tumult against her breast, and she stood like affrightened innocence, listening to advancing steps along the graveled walk. She seemed to hear Stella speak Professor Wentworth's name as if far away. Then she felt the grasp of his hand, that seemed to bring her back strangely as from a dream. It was the same warm pressure she had felt before, and the same loving gaze that had bid her a lingering adieu at Lakeside. Then she grew unaccountably calm, with a peacefully contented feeling, in the sound of his voice.

After the brief greeting, Stella pleasantly excused herself and left the two alone. They tarried for a while over the memories of the quiet lake which they recalled. Then, as these faded away, other thoughts drifted in naturally as the shades of evening which were softly gathering about them. Here, upon the trellised porch, the birds chattering overhead among the branches that almost embraced the home, the soft air from the valley fanning their faces, and with a quiet calm of nature that harmonized with their lovely characters, they approached the object for which the professor had sought Janie's presence again. He said at last:

"I have another roving commission—not among the wilds of untraveled lands as before—but through the byways of Europe. This time," he said, reaching out to take Janie's unresisting hand, "I want a companion. You once sympathized with me because of my companionless condition. Have you forgotten it?"

Her gentle shake of the head was answer. She did not look into his face, but seemed breathlessly waiting.

"Out on the lonely steppes of Central Asia the resolve was made never again to stray away from companionship. My commission now is a self-imposed one, but upon the condition that your pity, once expressed, shall take the shape of a little wife, and thus go with me."

He waited her reply. She sat lost in thought, seemingly forgetful of his presence or petition. Then, at length, she murmured:

"You will not go alone?"

"No; never again."

Then, with the beautiful face that had won so many hearts to her, and that had savingly penetrated the despair and abandonment of Stella's life, she looked upon him and gently answered:

"I will go with you."

Later on, Mr. and Mrs. Allen sat with them on the porch; and she, with tears, transferred her beloved daughter to his keeping.

Mrs. Allen could not dim the happiness of the two by reference now to the cruel heartache that tortured with the realization that she could no longer care for the loved one, as she had always done, with life's devotion. She did not doubt the child's future happiness; but it was her own severance from her presence and clinging dependence that pained. But then she thought as a vague consolation, that in time she would be called upon by nature to rudely break the tie and hide herself beneath the sod. It would only be anticipating the time for a little while.

Sorrow and happiness thus mingled in the hearts of the little group on the porch. But every throb, whether of sorrow or happiness, was for the gentle life of the tender child of nature, who was now to be transplanted. Her life would thus develop and bloom more beautifully, doubtless; as native plants do under the developing touches of cultivation.

Professor Wentworth had scarce driven away, when Stella's hurrying footsteps aroused them. She bounded up the steps, and caught Janie in her arms, and clung to her, weeping tears of joy.

"You need not tell me, Janie," she cried between her continued sobs; "I know it all. My poor heart is now at rest. O, I feel the joy of an answered prayer! It is above the sweetest pleasures of life. The generous, self-sacrificing heart is rewarded. I could never have been truly happy without it! But—I shall lose you!" she chokingly moaned, and sank into a chair at Janie's side almost overcome by excitement.

Janie would have sat beside her; but Stella drew her to her lap, and, with arms clinging to her waist, held her in close embrace.

Thus they wept together for a time. The first emotion of separation had come to them. Then Stella suddenly aroused, and eagerly asked, through her tears:

"When do you go away, dear?"

"In the winter-time."

"My heart told me it would be before the end of the year. And where?"

"I do not know—only that he said to Europe.

With a smile lighting up her tear-stained face, Stella then exclaimed :

“Yet a little longer to cling to you! O, that is consoling!”

It was not an infrequent thing, now, to see the lovely dapple-brown horses restlessly pawing at the earth in front of Janie’s gate. As time went on, the villagers entered into the preparation for the coming event as if each one’s own daughter was to be the favored bride. Every heart beat in loving sympathy as to their own.

One day, as the time drew near, Janie and Stella sat before the blazing fire, talking over their future prospects.

“You did not know, you little dear, how wealthy a husband you were getting,” Stella said; and then: “I do n’t believe you care for such things.”

“Why should I?”

“Why? Because every woman loves riches.”

“It did not cross my mind,” Janie answered.

“O, I could see that! But, being more worldly, I found it out. I have treasured the secret in my heart, that I might give you a glad surprise at last. And now you seemingly care least for it.”

“But, Stella,” Janie sweetly answered, “my friends, who knew him best, spoke only of his good qualities and manly traits and Christian sentiments. They won me more than riches could have done. The latter I could have mistrusted; but the former, never. Character is better than riches. If combined, I grant that life may be blessed.”

“Then yours will surely be blessed; for his worldly possessions are great. I can give you an insight to the facts.”

"No, no, Stella, dear; let him do that, if he should ever care to do so. I am not interested now. Let us rather talk of yourself."

"O that is a barren subject," Stella sadly replied.

"Not so. Tell me, Stella, have you no heart-desires clinging to the future? Remember! I shall never let you stray away from my thoughts or my help. You know you shall be to me then as now."

"I am contented to believe that you will think of me. Certainly we can not be as now!"

"Your sad words sound as if we were to be separated forever. That can not be!" cried Janie.

"But you know, Janie, I may outlive my parents," answered Stella, calmly. "I can not be a pensioner, dear," she continued, caressingly. "You have enlarged my heart-desires, and touched my life with your own sympathetic nature, and I have grown into a lingering desire to do good to others, and lift them out of trouble as you have done for me. That will be my mission when those I love most now shall have passed beyond my reach. There is a band of devoted women whose lives I envy. I shall wear the deaconess's badge, and try to fill her place, with love for God and poor humanity."

The disclosure of Stella's future plans was unexpected to Janie. It would be a sore trial to lose her companionship; but, if such was to be her life, she knew she would follow it with zeal, because of her impulsive character. Janie felt, in the moment, that she would herself have been fascinated with the life. She could resign her to such a calling, but not in estrangement. The ties of the present could never

be broken—she still would tenderly care for her. The plans of the hour were at last realized; and Janie lived on, as in the past, to bless and encourage her life.

We would gladly follow in the footsteps of the lovely lives that were blessed in good works, and linger with them along the pathway of the future; but our task is already accomplished in beholding the reward of nobility of the heart, and here we must separate.

* * * * *

Humanity is above the clod. Lovely nature takes hold of human reason, and pervades the heart as it can not material substance. Human lives approach so nearly the Creative Mind, through moral forces, that consciousness, at times, seems to overleap the reason, and disclose the Great Presence without its aid. The grosser qualities of nature are softened by refined and tender impulses; the reason willingly responds to the conviction of intelligence and plan in the operations of nature; and the individual becomes a child of nature in feeling, seeing, knowing the Heart that beats in purity and sympathy through all creation. With the vision of the mind and soul awakened to the loveliness of nature, an assured Personality becomes as certain as that of an absent friend, whose handwriting we know, and whose love we realize. Human destiny is strangely linked with this Personality, and, through the moral laws by which we are bound to it, becomes accountable for all good or evil deeds.

Ludlow's life exemplifies the penalty for the violation of moral requirements; Janie's, the noble outgrowth of purity, and the observance of such requirements; Stella's life assures that the penalty for evil may be averted by laying aside the

one life, and clinging to the other. The actors upon the stage of human life are ever busy in illustrating these truths. Human experiences prove that sorrow and degradation follow sin; that happiness and elevation of character are the inevitable consequences of good actions. It is not by chance that such conditions environ human destiny. Where, then, has moral law originated? In its origin and results it does not differ from physical law, which the human mind can not satisfy by the vague claim of necessity. It is necessary that mankind, to fill its best estate, should live good lives; for moral laws have interwoven upon them penalties for their violation. It is natural to look upon a Lawgiver as a personality, and thus our accountability to the Maker of moral laws becomes assured. In this line of thought we confront the Divinity that materialism would deny.

It is to be hoped that our simple story may help to illustrate the thought, and serve as an application. Janie beheld the presence of Divinity in every plant, and tree, and meadow, and rippling stream. May we all be children of nature, above the thought that dead matter could be the author of nature's beauties and mysteries! Recognizing God in nature, naturally inspires the reverential tendency. The reverential tendency naturally lifts the heart away from sin, and elevates the character; thus making better men and women, happier homes and lives, and, through charity, love, and pity, a help to each other.

The End.

With a smile lighting up her tear-stained face, Stella then exclaimed:

"Yet a little longer to cling to you! O, that is consoling!"

It was not an infrequent thing, now, to see the lovely dapple-brown horses restlessly pawing at the earth in front of Janie's gate. As time went on, the villagers entered into the preparation for the coming event as if each one's own daughter was to be the favored bride. Every heart beat in loving sympathy as to their own.

One day, as the time drew near, Janie and Stella sat before the blazing fire, talking over their future prospects.

"You did not know, you little dear, how wealthy a husband you were getting," Stella said; and then: "I do n't believe you care for such things."

"Why should I?"

"Why? Because every woman loves riches."

"It did not cross my mind," Janie answered.

"O, I could see that! But, being more worldly, I found it out. I have treasured the secret in my heart, that I might give you a glad surprise at last. And now you seemingly care least for it."

"But, Stella," Janie sweetly answered, "my friends, who knew him best, spoke only of his good qualities and manly traits and Christian sentiments. They won me more than riches could have done. The latter I could have mistrusted; but the former, never. Character is better than riches. If combined, I grant that life may be blessed."

"Then yours will surely be blessed; for his worldly possessions are great. I can give you an insight to the facts."

"No, no, Stella, dear; let him do that, if he should ever care to do so. I am not interested now. Let us rather talk of yourself."

"O that is a barren subject," Stella sadly replied.

"Not so. Tell me, Stella, have you no heart-desires clinging to the future? Remember! I shall never let you stray away from my thoughts or my help. You know you shall be to me then as now."

"I am contented to believe that you will think of me. Certainly we can not be as now!"

"Your sad words sound as if we were to be separated forever. That can not be!" cried Janie.

"But you know, Janie, I may outlive my parents," answered Stella, calmly. "I can not be a pensioner, dear," she continued, caressingly. "You have enlarged my heart-desires, and touched my life with your own sympathetic nature, and I have grown into a lingering desire to do good to others, and lift them out of trouble as you have done for me. That will be my mission when those I love most now shall have passed beyond my reach. There is a band of devoted women whose lives I envy. I shall wear the deaconess's badge, and try to fill her place, with love for God and poor humanity."

The disclosure of Stella's future plans was unexpected to Janie. It would be a sore trial to lose her companionship; but, if such was to be her life, she knew she would follow it with zeal, because of her impulsive character. Janie felt, in the moment, that she would herself have been fascinated with the life. She could resign her to such a calling, but not in estrangement. The ties of the present could never

be broken—she still would tenderly care for her. The plans of the hour were at last realized; and Janie lived on, as in the past, to bless and encourage her life.

We would gladly follow in the footsteps of the lovely lives that were blessed in good works, and linger with them along the pathway of the future; but our task is already accomplished in beholding the reward of nobility of the heart, and here we must separate.

* * * * *

Humanity is above the clod. Lovely nature takes hold of human reason, and pervades the heart as it can not material substance. Human lives approach so nearly the Creative Mind, through moral forces, that consciousness, at times, seems to overleap the reason, and disclose the Great Presence without its aid. The grosser qualities of nature are softened by refined and tender impulses; the reason willingly responds to the conviction of intelligence and plan in the operations of nature; and the individual becomes a child of nature in feeling, seeing, knowing the Heart that beats in purity and sympathy through all creation. With the vision of the mind and soul awakened to the loveliness of nature, an assured Personality becomes as certain as that of an absent friend, whose handwriting we know, and whose love we realize. Human destiny is strangely linked with this Personality, and, through the moral laws by which we are bound to it, becomes accountable for all good or evil deeds.

Ludlow's life exemplifies the penalty for the violation of moral requirements; Janie's, the noble outgrowth of purity, and the observance of such requirements; Stella's life assures that the penalty for evil may be averted by laying aside the

one life, and clinging to the other. The actors upon the stage of human life are ever busy in illustrating these truths. Human experiences prove that sorrow and degradation follow sin; that happiness and elevation of character are the inevitable consequences of good actions. It is not by chance that such conditions environ human destiny. Where, then, has moral law originated? In its origin and results it does not differ from physical law, which the human mind can not satisfy by the vague claim of necessity. It is necessary that mankind, to fill its best estate, should live good lives; for moral laws have interwoven upon them penalties for their violation. It is natural to look upon a Lawgiver as a personality, and thus our accountability to the Maker of moral laws becomes assured. In this line of thought we confront the Divinity that materialism would deny.

It is to be hoped that our simple story may help to illustrate the thought, and serve as an application. Janie beheld the presence of Divinity in every plant, and tree, and meadow, and rippling stream. May we all be children of nature, above the thought that dead matter could be the author of nature's beauties and mysteries! Recognizing God in nature, naturally inspires the reverential tendency. The reverential tendency naturally lifts the heart away from sin, and elevates the character; thus making better men and women, happier homes and lives, and, through charity, love, and pity, a help to each other.

The End.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00023191611